



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE EXPLOITATION OF A WEAK STATE: AL-QAEDA IN  
THE ARABIAN PENINSULA IN YEMEN**

by

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June 2010

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> June 2010	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> The Exploitation of a Weak State: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Nicholas J. Hedberg				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol number _____.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> Yemen is a weak state, as the government does not have the capability to assert effective control over the entirety of its territory. The Yemeni government faces three major challenges today including: the Houthi Rebellion, secessionists, and growing political unrest due to its failing economy and inability to provide basic social services to its people. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has recently made a resurgence in Yemen since its near destruction in 2003. Yemen's weak state characteristics, along with the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia, and the lack of Yemeni political will to combat the threat of AQAP and their global jihadist agenda have made the state an ideal location for the regional organization. AQAP has been able to exploit Yemen's weaknesses and build strong ties with the Yemeni tribes in the areas of Yemen where the government has little control. The study argues that due to these circumstances, Yemen has the strong possibility of becoming a safe haven for transnational terrorism akin to al-Qaeda's base in Pakistan today. To prevent al-Qaeda from using Yemen as their next base for transnational terrorism, the international community must help Yemen address the factors that have allowed AQAP to exploit the country.				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Terrorism, Weak States.			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 111	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	

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**THE EXPLOITATION OF A WEAK STATE:  
AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA IN YEMEN**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH ASIA, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

Yemen is a weak state, as the government does not have the capability to assert effective control over the entirety of its territory. The Yemeni government faces three major challenges today including: the Houthi Rebellion, secessionists, and growing political unrest due to its failing economy and inability to provide basic social services to its people. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has recently made a resurgence in Yemen since its near destruction in 2003. Yemen's weak state characteristics, along with the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia, and the lack of Yemeni political will to combat the threat of AQAP and their global jihadist agenda have made the state an ideal location for the regional organization. AQAP has been able to exploit Yemen's weaknesses and build strong ties with the Yemeni tribes in the areas of Yemen where the government has little control. The study argues that due to these circumstances, Yemen has the strong possibility of becoming a safe haven for transnational terrorism akin to al-Qaeda's base in Pakistan today. To prevent al-Qaeda from using Yemen as their next base for transnational terrorism, the international community must help Yemen address the factors that have allowed AQAP to exploit the country.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
DRY	Democratic Republic of Yemen
GPC	General Popular Congress
FLSY	Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAA	Islamic Army of Aden
MAK	Afghan Service Bureau
NIF	National Islamic Front
NLF	National Liberation Front
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PRAC	Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare
ROY	Republic of Yemen
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank Professor Mohammed Hafez and Professor Robert Springborg for taking the time out of their extremely busy schedules to guide me through the thesis process. Without their hard work and direction, this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the professors I have had at the Naval Postgraduate School, who have always been willing to spend the time to mentor me throughout my education here. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Marlene, for supporting me during this process, and for always pushing me to get to the library to get my work done.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. RESEARCH QUESTION**

Al-Qaeda is a transnational network that has conducted operations throughout the world since its founding in Afghanistan in 1988, and has mainly operated from three states known for weak central authority: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan. Weak states pose many of the same problems as failed states because “poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks.”<sup>1</sup> Today, Yemen fits the definition of a weak state, as the government does not have the capability to assert effective control over the entirety of its territory nor the ability to provide basic social services to all its people.<sup>2</sup> The Yemeni government faces many challenges today including: the Houthi Rebellion in the North, secessionists in the South, and growing political unrest due to its failing economy and inability to provide basic social services. Because of the challenges the Yemeni government faces, they are less able to combat al-Qaeda, which has had a presence in Yemen for over a decade.

Al-Qaeda has recently made a resurgence in Yemen since its near destruction in the country in 2003. The revitalization of the organization in Yemen should be cause for concern for both the Yemeni government as well as the United States, but Al-Qaeda seems to have fallen low on the priority list of both countries. After “Yemen achieved success in utilizing U.S. support to dismantle the leadership of al-Qa’ida in Yemen,” the Yemeni government and the United States turned their focus elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> U.S. focus went to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Yemeni focus turned to the Houthi

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda’s Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004), 26.

<sup>2</sup> There is no universal definition for weak and failed states, but for the purpose of this study I will define a weak state as a state that is limited in its ability to effectively control the whole of its territory and is limited in its ability to provide basic social and political goods to its people. A failed state has no control over its territory or borders and lacks the political authority and ability to impose the rule of law. It can no longer produce the conditions for its own existence.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “Securing Yemen’s Cooperation in the Second Phase of the War on al-Qa’ida,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 1, no. 1 (November 2007), 14.

rebellion in northern Yemen, among other domestic challenges. After the dismantling of their leadership from 2002–2003, the al-Qaeda organization remained splintered until the February 2006 prison break of 23 al-Qaeda militants that rejuvenated the organization. In less than four years, the al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen has transformed itself from a fractured and fragmented group into an organization that is intent on and capable of launching attacks throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the West.<sup>4</sup>

In early 2009, the head of al-Qaeda in Yemen, Nasser al-Wahayshi, announced a merger between his organization and al-Qaeda's Saudi branch to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The establishment of AQAP caused the U.S. Director of National Intelligence to note that Yemen was “re-emerging as a jihadist battleground and potential regional base of operation for al-Qaeda.”<sup>5</sup> The reemergence of AQAP in Yemen should cause alarm for both the Yemeni government and the United States with respect to their fight to eliminate al-Qaeda as a legitimate organization. This study explores the role of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (APAP) in Yemen. It investigates the origins of the AQAP, its grievances and ideology, linkages to transnational jihadists, and current role as the leading al-Qaeda affiliate organization in the region. Central to this inquiry is the study of Yemen's limitations in countering AQAP due to the challenges the government currently faces. It concludes by exploring the implications of AQAP's resurgence for the war against al-Qaeda.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

Yemen seems to be a breeding ground for terrorism; as of November 2008, “more than one-third of the remaining 255 detainees at the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay are Yemenis, representing the single largest national contingent.”<sup>6</sup> Al-Qaeda has been able to conduct prominent attacks against western interests in the Yemeni area and, as recently as 25 December 2010, has attempted to attack the United States. If

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “The Expansion Strategy of Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 2, no. 9 (September 2009), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Andre Lee Butters, “The Next Afghanistan?” *Time International* 174, no. 13, 05 October 2009, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Johnsen and Christopher Boucek, “The Dilemma of the Yemeni Detainees at Guantanamo Bay,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 1, no. 12 (November 2008): 1.



the Republic of Yemen (ROY) is not able to counter AQAP, and the nation continues to weaken due to the major internal challenges that it faces, Yemen has a very good chance of becoming the next major operational center for al-Qaeda. The message al-Qaeda disseminates is resonating with a portion of the Yemeni population, and they are able to garner support in the tribal areas of Yemen. Al-Qaeda's goals and strategy in Yemen are important because if Yemen continues to weaken, the Yemeni government will not have the resources to combat AQAP.

The importance of the status of al-Qaeda in Yemen is also important to the United States campaign to eliminate al-Qaeda as a viable terrorist organization. After the Soviet War in Afghanistan ended in 1989, Afghan-Arabs headed by Osama bin Laden, left Afghanistan. During al-Qaeda's formative years, they operated out of Sudan until they were forced to leave in 1996 when they sought refuge in Afghanistan once again, upon invitation by the Taliban. The United States' invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 has put al-Qaeda on the run again as they seek refuge in the ungoverned areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The United States has eliminated Afghanistan as a location where al-Qaeda can operate freely, limited its ability to train and recruit, and has also depleted its manpower, as many al-Qaeda members have been killed or captured. Yemen plays an important role in the fight against al-Qaeda because if the United States is successful in removing al-Qaeda completely from Pakistan and Afghanistan, al-Qaeda may look to the weakening state of Yemen as a location where it can regroup, train, and conduct operations. The United States may need to adjust its current policy with Yemen to combat a possible revival of al-Qaeda in Yemen. The importance of the research question is that it studies the role of al-Qaeda in a weak state and the effect it may have on the national interests and security of the United States.

### **C. ISSUES RAISED BY RESEARCH QUESTION**

The three most important issues raised by the research question are: (1) What is the likelihood of al-Qaeda establishing a viable regional presence in the Persian Gulf through its activities and networks in Yemen? (2) Can the relatively weak state of Yemen combat al-Qaeda on its own and does it have the political will to do so, or does it require

the assistance of regional and international powers such as Saudi Arabia and the United States respectively? and (3) What are the resources and forms of assistance necessary for helping Yemen combat the scourge of al-Qaeda terrorism? The first issue when studying the role of al-Qaeda within Yemen is very important, especially if the United States is successful in eliminating the presence of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If the Yemeni government is unable or unwilling to counter the rising threat of AQAP in Yemen, the al-Qaeda organization may look to the nation as a possible headquarters to operate from if the United States is able to expel them from their current location. Yemen could be seen as a favorable selection for al-Qaeda as “about two-thirds of the country is out of government control and in the hands of either separatist groups or local tribes.”<sup>7</sup> The government’s weakness in its inability to control the whole of its territory would make it easier for the organization to recruit, train, and operate.

A second major issue is a question of resources and will. The Yemeni government has been entrenched in a fight against the Houthi Rebellion in the northern part of its country, against Yemenis who have called for secession in the south, and against political unrest due to its failing economy and inability to provide basic social services. The two conflicts have taken vast amounts of resources from the government, and hindered its ability to fix other problems in the country that have caused political unrest. Whereas AQAP has mainly struck at Western targets, the Houthis and southern secessionists are striking against the government, causing them to rise to the top of the Yemeni government’s priority list. With the early success of the Yemeni government against al-Qaeda in Yemen from 2002 to 2003, the Yemeni government sees al-Qaeda as less of a threat and, therefore, has focused on combating the two conflicts at the expense of combating AQAP.

The third issue raised by studying the role of the AQAP in Yemen is to what extent the United States must help the Yemeni government due to its inability to combat AQAP by itself. According to the Yemen state news agency, the United States has pledged to help fight against terrorism and “stand beside Yemen, its unity, security, and

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<sup>7</sup> Butters, “The Next Afghanistan?” 32.

stability.”<sup>8</sup> After the decisive victory in the first phase of the war against al-Qaeda in Yemen, the United States turned its attention away from Yemen’s counterterrorism efforts and towards the regime’s political and economic problems. The challenge for the United States now is how to strengthen Yemen’s capacity to combat terrorism by strengthening the government’s ability to counter the global jihadist threat as well as eliminate the grievances AQAP uses to gain support of a portion of the population while, at the same time, support needed political and economic reforms in the country.<sup>9</sup>

Through studying the role of AQAP in Yemen, and examining the issues that will arise by the major research question, we will gain a much better understanding of the intentions and goals of al-Qaeda and AQAP in Yemen. Yemen is going to continue to be used as a safe haven for al-Qaeda members, and the United States’ success in Afghanistan and Pakistan is going to determine whether Yemen will be a staging point for al-Qaeda’s war against the West. What the future holds for Yemen is going to rely on international support and the ability to stabilize the country so it can fight the threat of AQAP and global terrorism in Yemen.

#### **D. MAIN ARGUMENT**

This thesis will argue that the weak state characteristics of Yemen are just one of three main reasons why AQAP has been able rebuild in Yemen to become a viable terrorist threat in the country. Yemen’s weak state characteristics, along with the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia, and the lack of Yemeni political will to combat the threat of AQAP and its global jihadist agenda, have made the state an ideal location for the regional organization. AQAP has been able to exploit these weaknesses and build strong ties with the Yemeni tribes in those areas of Yemen where the government has very little control. The study argues that due to these circumstances, Yemen has the strong possibility of becoming a safe haven for transnational terrorism akin to al-Qaeda’s base in Pakistan today. To combat the threat of AQAP in Yemen, the U.S., along with

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald F. Seib, “Threat Persists in Yemen, Somalia” *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 October 2009, Eastern edition, A2.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Knights, “U.S. Embassy Bombing in Yemen: Counterterrorism Challenges in Weak States,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #1404 (24 September 2008).

regional and international powers, should continue to target the leadership of AQAP, help create stability by assisting in ending the two major internal conflicts in the country, address the underlying grievances of the population, and help institute a well-founded soft counterterrorism program. Yemen does not have the capacity to combat the transnational threat caused by AQAP alone and, therefore, needs the assistance of regional and international powers to help eliminate the terrorist threat of AQAP in its country.

## **E. ROADMAP**

This study will be organized in as straightforward a manner as possible to help understand the role of AQAP in Yemen and how and why it has been successful in rejuvenating the organization in the country. The first chapter of the paper will focus on the history of Yemen in the twentieth century. Yemen has only been a united country since 1990, and it is important to understand the context in which the northern part of Yemen and southern area of Yemen merged together to become the Republic of Yemen. Chapter II will also include a study of al-Qaeda's history in Yemen up to its near total destruction in 2003. Al-Qaeda has had an important role in Yemen in the last twenty years, and it is important to understand how they have been able to operate in the country. Chapter III will focus on AQAP in Yemen today. It will examine its attacks, goals, political and theological stated objectives, and its links to its al-Qaeda leadership. The section will also study the strategies being employed by AQAP to garner support among the people, and how it has learned from mistakes made abroad.

Chapter IV of the thesis will study the many challenges that the Yemeni government faces today, and how they take away from their ability to combat AQAP. Chapter V will look at why Yemen has become a viable location for AQAP to operate from including its weak state characteristics, the success of Saudi Arabia against jihad, and the lack of political will of the Yemeni government. The thesis will conclude with four recommendations that the United States should consider to combat the threat of AQAP in the country to prevent it from becoming the next Afghanistan.

## II. HISTORY OF MODERN YEMEN

### A. FORMING A SINGLE STATE

The Republic of Yemen celebrated its twentieth year as a united country in May 2010. Throughout most of the twentieth century, Yemen was divided into two separate countries. Their histories had differing paths that included foreign meddling, which played a major role in the development of two disconnected nations. In 1990, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in North Yemen and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in South Yemen merged to form the Republic of Yemen (ROY). Yemen's history in the latter half of the twentieth century has been entrenched with violence and civil war, and it is no wonder that today the Yemeni government has a myriad of problems that shake the foundation and stability of the nation. Studying the past fifty years of Yemeni history in North and South Yemen clarifies the reasoning for many of the issues that a united Yemen faces today, and gives insight on how to resolve the problems that strike at the heart of its internal dilemmas.

The British had a tremendous role in the history of Southern Yemen. In 1839, the British captured the port city of Aden to use as a coaling station to protect their line of communications with India, which was their most important imperial possession at the time. The British built treaty relationships with local leaders in the region to help safeguard their acquisition and even established protectorates over many of the local rulers.<sup>10</sup> After the turn of the century, in 1904, a border was established between North and South Yemen between the British, who occupied South Yemen around Aden, and the Ottomans who had occupied Sanaa, and ruled North Yemen.<sup>11</sup> Aden was ruled as a part

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Kuhn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007), 319.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 219.

of British India until it was made a crown colony in 1937. The areas surrounding the port of Aden were made into two protectorates under the British and they continued their rule of Southern Yemen until the mid-1960s.<sup>12</sup>

Northern Yemen was encompassed under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from 1872, with the capture of Sanaa, until the end of World War I. Though the Zaydi Islamic dynasties (Zaydi sect of Islam will be discussed in a later chapter) had governed Yemen directly and nominally from 897, from the sixteenth until the twentieth centuries most of Yemen's territories were part of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup> In 1911, a treaty between the Ottoman military forces in Yemen, and the Zaydi Imam Yahya made Imam Yahya

A dependent ruler and Zaydi community leader under Ottoman sovereignty. This agreement brought to a close more than two decades of fierce confrontation between the imam and his predecessors on one side and the imperial government in Istanbul on the other.<sup>14</sup>

The agreement was seen as Imam Yahya's first step towards building an independent Yemeni state, and after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, their forces finally withdrew from Yemeni territory in 1918. Imam Yahya's descendants remained the rulers of Northern Yemen until the early 1960s, when both Northern Yemen and Southern Yemen fought to gain independence from their monarchical rulers.

The 1960s were a very tumultuous period in both Northern and Southern Yemen; that decade saw the intrusion of foreign nations in Yemeni affairs and the declaration of two distinctly independent states. In Northern Yemen, tensions with the Zaydi dynasty had been prevalent for years. Imam Yahya was assassinated in 1948 in an unsuccessful coup attempt, and after the death of his son, Imam Ahmad, in 1962, his successor, Imam al-Badr, was deposed on 26 September 1962 by revolutionary forces. This event triggered a five-year proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Imam al-Badr was deposed by

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Yemen," *Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs* (December 2007) <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35836.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, 13 January 2010, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Kuhn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919," 315.

junior army officers who established the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) with Colonel Abadallah al-Sallal becoming president of the newly-founded state. Imam al-Badr and his royalist allies rallied against the new government, and it was soon clear to the republicans that they would not be able to survive without Egyptian assistance, which had helped the republicans in the months before the coup. Egypt dispatched forces by early October, and “by early 1963, there were probably 15,000 in Yemen; six months later there were double that—and in every Yemen office, as offices were set up, was an Egyptian adviser without whom nothing was allowed to happen.”<sup>15</sup> Saudi Arabia viewed an Egyptian-backed revolution on their border as a threat to their own monarchy and armed the royalists to defeat the republicans.

By mid-1965, Egypt had nearly 60,000 troops in Yemen, and campaigns throughout Northern Yemen had cost Egypt a high number of casualties, though they controlled very little outside of Sanaa. The proxy war went on between Egypt and Saudi Arabia until 1967 with the defeat of the Egyptian army, by Israel, in the Six Day War. Soon thereafter, peace talks between Saudi Arabia and Egypt began. An agreement was reached between the two countries in the second half of 1967 in which Egyptian forces would be removed from Yemen and Saudi Arabia would cease to aid the monarchists.<sup>16</sup> Though Egyptian and Saudi Arabian involvement in Yemen had ended, the war continued for three more years, until the eventual victory of the republicans in 1970, and the National Reconciliation between the royalists and the republicans in the north.

While the republicans and royalists were fighting for sovereignty in the north, Yemenis in the south were demanding independence from the British who had ruled Southern Yemen around Aden for over one hundred years. The southern grievances stemmed from the belief that British “imperialism wants a very large military base in the area to protect its interests and...exploit the resources of our country and thus raise the standard of living of the British people, while our own live a miserable and abject life.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> Shaul Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 109.

<sup>17</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 96.

Fighting between Southern Yemenis and the British began in 1963 and was depicted as a war against colonialism. Two rival nationalist groups formed in Southern Yemen and both turned to terrorism against the British in their attempt to control the country. The Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) attacked the British with uncontrollable violence and the British eventually conceded, and in 1966, announced that they would leave Aden by 1968.

The announcement of a British withdrawal from Southern Yemen did nothing to end the brutality by the Yemeni national groups against the British troops stationed in and around Aden as violence escalated after the announcement. The FLOSY and the NLF even announced a short-lived alliance, backed by Egyptian President Abdel Nasser, who said, “the people must wage armed revolution against the enemy, in which they must pay the highest price of blood.”<sup>18</sup> The alliance between the two rival nationalist groups ended at the end of 1966, but the violence did not. Along with the continued aggression against the British, the two groups began murdering each other in growing numbers as well. The British ended up withdrawing earlier than they had announced. By the end of November 1967, the British had completely left Aden; Southern Yemen was declared independent and renamed the People’s Republic of South Yemen. The NLF immediately turned against the FLOSY and fighting erupted with the NLF emerging victorious and taking control of the government. The NLF killed hundreds of people, purged all FLOSY elements from the army and police forces, and eliminated any civilians who opposed their rule. Factions within the NLF then began to fight amongst themselves and, in 1969, a Marxist wing of the NLF gained power, changed the name of the country to the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), and all political parties were merged into the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), which became the only legal party.<sup>19</sup> North and South Yemen were finally independently unified without any foreign interference in their governments, but Yemen as a whole still remained divided.

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<sup>18</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 110.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Yemen.”



In the 1970s and 1980s, relations between the YAR and the PDRY were often strained and, though unification was discussed, little was done to forward the topic. At a time when the Cold War was at its peak, the Marxist PDRY developed strong ties with the Soviet Union and other countries in the Eastern Bloc, and in the late 1970s, the YAR began to develop ties with the West, though it had relations with the Soviets as well. In 1972, a border war broke out, and again in 1979, “war broke out between the Yemens, and the southerners took a number of towns beyond the border.”<sup>20</sup> In response, President Carter of the United States, who did not want to appear to look weak on Communism, sent tanks and the most modern weapons to Sanaa to combat the Communist encroachment. The dispute was soon brought to an end by Arab states, and the presidents of both countries promised to strive towards unity between the Yemens.

During the two decades after independence, the Yemen Arab Republic depended heavily on migrant labor. Workers left the YAR and moved to Saudi Arabia, which was in the midst of an oil boom. It is estimated that of the North’s total population of 5.3 million people in 1975, about 630,000 of them were migrants working in the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. Remittances to the YAR were \$40 million in 1969–70, \$800 million in 1976–77, and stood at \$1.3 billion in 1978–79. Whole quarters of Jiddah and Riyadh were Yemeni as workers stayed in the oil state and worked in the flourishing economy to make money to send back to their native country. The huge amounts of money sent home by Yemeni workers in Saudi Arabia far exceeded the revenue that the central government could produce.<sup>21</sup> The government in Northern Yemen did nothing to tax the remittances and had little ability to raise money internally and, therefore, depended heavily on foreign aid and debt. The YAR was promised \$300 million by Iraq in 1979, and President Saleh was even granted a palace in Iraq by Sadaam Hussein. In the south, the PDRY also depended heavily on aid and loans. Though the Soviet Union contributed financial support to the PDRY, it depended on many of the same institutions as the North for financial support, including Kuwait, the World Bank, and Abu Dhabi.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 149.

<sup>21</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 134.

Both Yemens relied upon other countries to support them through loans, aid, and remittances as, until 1984, Yemen had the misfortune of being the only Arabian state not to have found oil.

Suddenly, in November 1989, Ali Abdullah Saleh (President of YAR) and Ali Salim al-Bidh (President of PDRY) agreed to a draft unity constitution, and the Republic of Yemen (ROY) was declared on 22 May 1990. Saleh, who was also general secretary of the General Popular Congress (GPC), which ruled in the North, became president of the new republic and al-Bidh, who was the general secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in the South, became vice-president. The unity accords outlined a transitional period where the two parties would split power equally in the government until general elections could be held, even though the South only made up one-fifth of the total unified Yemeni population.<sup>23</sup> After 150 years of separation, it looked as though unification might finally bring prosperity to the Yemeni state and people, but the honeymoon period did not last long, and Yemen was thrown onto the world stage with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

On 02 August 1990, Iraq, under the dictatorship of Sadaam Hussein, invaded its small southern neighbor, Kuwait. Often in history, this would have had little to no effect on the happenings in Yemen but, at this time, a unified Yemen had the great misfortune to be a member of the United Nations Security Council. Yemen was the only Arab state among the 15 members and, as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was condemned, Yemen remained the one abstention. Yemen stood behind the decision of Sadaam Hussein and when the other Arab countries accepted a Western presence on their soil to combat the aggression of their Iraqi neighbor, Yemen went the opposite direction. The Yemeni contingent in the Security Council urged an Arab solution, which showed support for Iraq. In response to Yemeni support of Iraq, on 19 September “the Saudi government revoked the special status of Yemenis within the Kingdom. Hundreds of thousands, obliged often to sell at derisory prices whatever they could not take by truck, were forced home.”<sup>24</sup> Many other Gulf states followed the lead of the Saudis and expelled the

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<sup>23</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Fragility and Extremism in Yemen,” February 2010, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 185.

Yemeni population residing inside their borders; as many as 800,000 Yemenis returned to Yemen. The United States also cut off ties with the newly unified state. The subsequent consequences saw a disintegration of foreign remittances and the foreign aid income the Yemeni government depended on, not to mention the overflow of the 800,000 newly returned Yemenis to a Yemeni economy that had no jobs for them.<sup>25</sup> The decision to support Iraq during the Gulf War put Yemen in a difficult position internationally, and the next step for the newly unified state was to conduct elections and attempt to create a unified government that could govern effectively.

In April 1993, elections took place for the first time in Yemen. President Saleh's GPC party won 123 of the 301 seats in the new parliament. The YSP only garnered 56 seats, less than the 62 seats won by the Islah Party, which consisted of various tribal and religious groups. The YSP claims to share power equally were now made relatively weak by their performance in the elections. A parliament vote was soon cast to create a five-member Presidential Council, with the YSP gaining only one seat. Conflicts in the coalition soon arose and continuous negotiations between the Northern GPC and the Southern YSP solved very little. Civil war broke out in late April 1994 and, on 21 May, Southern leaders declared secession and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY). The international community did not recognize the DRY. Most of the fighting was done in the South, and by 07 July, Aden was sacked and the civil war essentially ended with President Saleh and the North as victors, keeping the nation unified. Thousands of Southern leaders and military leaders went into exile, but during the early fighting, President Saleh announced a general amnesty, and most of those who went into exile returned shortly.<sup>26</sup> The unification of Yemen was safe for the time being, but the civil war had implications that last even today.

The civil war in Yemen in 1994 was not North versus South, but rather between political parties, mainly the General Peoples Congress (GPC) versus the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Those living in the South did not see it that way though, and because most

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<sup>25</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 185–186.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Yemen."

of the fighting was done in the South, they saw it as a Northern invasion, and Northern legitimacy is still a recurrent theme today.<sup>27</sup> In the wake of the victory,

Saleh tightened the regime's grip of the country's natural resource wealth—most of which is located in the former South Yemen—purged most southerners from his patronage networks, and placed northerners in charge of the south's economy and security. This was made all the easier by the fact that the former South Yemen's oil infrastructure was just coming online by the early 1990s. During the war, Saleh's security services helped deepen the north-south divide by recruiting so-called “popular armies” of tribesmen, itinerant jihadists, and former *mujahedin* as proxy militias to help prosecute the war against the South.<sup>28</sup>

Soon after the end of the war, amendments to the constitution eliminated the presidential council and President Saleh was elected by Parliament to a five-year term on 01 October 1994. In 1999, Yemen held its first direct presidential elections, and elected President Saleh to another five-year term. In 2000, an amendment was made to the constitution to change the term of presidency to a seven-year term and in 2006, President Saleh was elected once again to lead Yemen.<sup>29</sup> President Saleh has held power in North Yemen since 1978 and has ruled the unified Republic of Yemen (ROY) since 1990. His government has been known for being corrupt, ineffective, and incompetent. Today, Yemen is a weak state that faces many crises and its ability to govern all the territories within its borders causes great concern for the international community.

Yemen's modern history has been marked by foreign powers using Yemen for their own interests, and today, in the world, it is distinguished by the fact that it is once again being used. This time, not by a foreign nation, but by al-Qaeda, a transnational organization that is using Yemen as a breeding ground for extremism, and a base for its local branch, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

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<sup>27</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Fragility and Extremism in Yemen,” 19.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Yemen.”

## **B. HISTORY OF AL-QAEDA IN YEMEN**

Yemen, as a breeding ground for terrorism and terrorist attacks, first came to the public spotlight in the United States after the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole that killed 17 U.S. sailors. The destruction of the two towers at the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon less than a year later by al-Qaeda, quickly stole attention away from terrorism in Yemen. Since 11 September 2001, the United States has been engaged in two wars in the Middle East and the terrorist threat of al-Qaeda in Yemen was quickly forgotten. On 02 January 2010, President Obama commented on the plot to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight over American soil on Christmas Day 2009, and nine years later, Yemen once again has the attention of the United States. President Obama declared that Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a 23-year-old Nigerian, traveled to Yemen where “he joined an affiliate of Al Qaeda and that this group, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, trained him, equipped him with those explosives and directed him to attack that plane headed for America.”<sup>30</sup> The threat of terrorism in and from Yemen has now, once again, attracted the interest of the United States and other Western nations. The threat of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was articulated by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation when he said, “as the Christmas day attempted bombing illustrates, the threats we face are becoming more diverse and more dangerous with each passing day.”<sup>31</sup>

Although the threat of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the Yemeni and Saudi Arabian affiliate of al-Qaeda in the Gulf is a relatively new threat, the threat of al-Qaeda in the area is not. Al-Qaeda has been operating in Yemen for nearly twenty years with their first attack on U.S. interests occurring in 1992. After the al-Qaeda bombing of the USS Cole, the United States was successful in the dismantling of the al-Qaeda leadership in Yemen. By 2003, there were few remnants of al-Qaeda in Yemen, but since 2006, al-

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Baker, “Obama Says Al Qaeda in Yemen Planned Bombing Plot, and He Vows Retribution,” *NY Times*, 03 January 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Lorraine Woellert, “FBI Chief Tells Congress Terrorist Threat Grows More Worrisome,” *Bloomberg Business Week*, 20 January 2010. <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-01-20/fbi-chief-tells-congress-terrorist-threat-grows-more-worrisome.html>.

Qaeda has been able to conduct numerous attacks against Western citizens and their interests, and with the attempted Christmas Day bombing, Yemen is again relevant in U.S. counterterrorism operations.

The creation of the al-Qaeda organization took place sometime in 1988 in Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam. Osama bin Laden was born 30 July 1957 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. His father had migrated from the Hadrahmat in Yemen to Saudi Arabia and was a wealthy construction magnate who had risen from poverty.<sup>32</sup> It is believed that bin Laden adopted militant Islamic views while studying at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He studied under Muhammad Qutb, brother of Sayyid Qutb, a key ideologue in the Muslim Brotherhood and for violent Islamic revolutionaries. Another one of his instructors at the university was Abdullah Azzam, who is identified as the intellectual architect of jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> Soon after the December 1979 Soviet invasion, bin Laden went to Afghanistan to rid a Muslim territory and people of a non-Muslim power.

While in Afghanistan, bin Laden used his own funds to support the Afghan *mujahedin*, and established himself as a recruiter of Arab and other Islamic volunteers for the war. Bin Laden and Azzam together created a network of offices to recruit and fund-raise in the Arab world, Europe, and the United States. The network, the Afghan Service Bureau (MAK), is today seen as the forerunner of al-Qaeda. MAK catered primarily to the foreign *mujahedin*, and

In addition to recruiting, indoctrinating and training tens of thousands of Arab and Muslim youths from countries ranging from the US to the Philippines, MAK disbursed \$200 million of Middle Eastern and Western, mainly American and British, aid destined for the Afghan *jihad*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 21–22.

<sup>33</sup> John Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service* (05 February 2010): 3.

<sup>34</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 24–25.

Throughout the 1980s and the fight against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, bin Laden was not known to have openly promoted or planned any attacks against the United States, though he and his companions were very critical of the U.S. support for Israel.<sup>35</sup>

Sometime in 1988, toward the end of the Soviet occupation, bin Laden and Azzam began calling their volunteer organization al-Qaeda (Arabic for “the base”) and contemplated how the organization would be utilized. Azzam’s goal for the organization was to “create an Islamic army akin to an international rapid-reaction force that would come to the rescue of Muslims wherever and whenever they were in need.”<sup>36</sup> In Azzam’s analysis, jihad would remain an individual obligation until all other lands that were Muslim were returned so that Islam would reign once again. Bin Laden differed with Azzam on the role of the new organization and wanted to dispatch the al-Qaeda members to their home countries to attempt to topple secular regimes and pro-Western Arab leaders, such as Mubarak in Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s royal family. Some attribute the differences to the influence of Egyptians in bin Laden’s inner circle, who wanted to use the resources of al-Qaeda to topple the Egyptian regime and install an Islamic state.<sup>37</sup>

Bin Laden was very popular with the fighters in Afghanistan and gained tremendous respect for leaving his affluent life to live with the Afghan peasants and Arab fighters. His “wealth, influence, and fearlessness made him a natural leader of the Arab *mujahedin*—most of whom were Saudis, Yemenis, Algerians, and Egyptians—in the late 1980s.”<sup>38</sup> Then, in November 1989, Azzam was assassinated and bin Laden became the uncontested emir of al-Qaeda. Bin Laden returned home to Saudi Arabia in 1989, after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, and with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 02 August 1990 bin Laden turned from a relative ally of the United States against the Soviet

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<sup>35</sup> Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> Asaf Maghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>37</sup> Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” 4.

<sup>38</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 28.

Union to one of the United States' most determined enemies. Bin Laden petitioned the Saudi officials not to allow U.S. combat troops in Saudi Arabia, and instead, allow him to use his Islamic army to remove the Iraqis from Kuwait. His idea was opposed by the leadership in Saudi Arabia and led to a falling out with the Saudi royal family. Instead, 500,000 U.S. troops deployed to Saudi Arabia to conduct "Operation Desert Storm" to drive out the Iraqis in early 1991. Although only a relatively small number of U.S. forces remained in Saudi Arabia after the operation, bin Laden and his followers saw the U.S. forces as occupiers of sacred Islamic land, and the Saudi royal family as facilitators to the occupation.<sup>39</sup>

After bin Laden's disagreement with the Saudi royal family, he received an invitation from the National Islamic Front (NIF) to move to Sudan. Bin Laden, after studying the situation in Sudan, accepted the invitation from the spiritual head of the NIF, Hasan al-Turabi, whose party had come to power in 1989.<sup>40</sup> In Sudan, al-Qaeda bought property and set up areas to host and train al-Qaeda militants to use against the United States and its interests around the world. They also trained for operations in the Balkans, Chechnya, Kashmir, and the Philippines. After planning and conducting numerous operations from Sudan, including the attempted assassination of the president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, international pressure increased on Sudan to expel bin Laden from the country. The United States began increasing military assistance to Sudan's hostile neighbors of Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Ultimately, Sudan caved in to international pressure and bin Laden was asked to leave Sudan. In May 1996, bin Laden returned to Afghanistan where he assisted the Taliban in defeating the Northern Alliance for control of the country. In return for his assistance, bin Laden was given an al-Qaeda sanctuary and was provided "weapons, equipment, and training facilities. Furthermore, Al Qaeda was permitted to use Afghanistan's national aircraft to transport members, recruits, and supplies from overseas."<sup>41</sup> Bin Laden remained in Afghanistan until the U.S. invasion in

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<sup>39</sup> Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy," 5.

<sup>40</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 39–40.

<sup>41</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 54.



2001, after the World Trade Center bombings and, today, is still believed to be living in the area on the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Al-Qaeda began to play a role in Yemen because of the Afghan-Soviet War. During the war between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, many Yemenis embraced the cause of the Afghan rebels and backed their Muslim brothers against the invading Soviets. It is estimated that some 30,000 volunteers left Yemen for Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.<sup>42</sup> The Yemeni government, as well as the U.S. government as an extension of the Cold War, supported the Yemenis to fight as *mujahedin* against the Soviets, who backed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in Southern Yemen at the time. Throughout this period, "U.S. officials perceived the volunteers as positive contributors to the effort to expel Soviet forces from Afghanistan, and U.S. officials made no apparent effort to stop the recruitment of the non-Afghan volunteers for the war."<sup>43</sup>

While doing their part to repel the Soviets from Afghanistan, some gained battle experience and many were indoctrinated by al-Qaeda's jihadist ideology. After the Soviet withdrawal and the end of the war in Afghanistan, many of the radicalized Yemenis returned to Yemen and became its vanguard of radical Islam. A key figure in the formation of radical Islam in the country was Sheikh Abdul al-Zindani, a senior Islamic religious leader in Yemen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. He was a central activist in recruiting Yemeni volunteers to fight in Afghanistan and even took part in combat against the Soviets.<sup>44</sup> Al-Zindani met and became acquainted with bin Laden during his time in Afghanistan and is still believed to be the theological advisor to bin Laden today.<sup>45</sup> The Yemeni Afghans built upon the relationships formed in Afghanistan, and became the "basis for the al-Qaeda network that exists in Yemen today."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy," 4.

<sup>44</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Erlanger, "At Yemen College, Scholarship and Jihadist Ideas," *NY Times*, 19 January 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror*, 73.

In the past, Yemen had been seen as a bus stop, not a headquarters for al-Qaeda. It has been used as a place to stash and rest fighters and where smaller operations have taken place. After the return of the Yemenis who fought in the Afghan war, al-Qaeda began to establish bases of operations within Yemen as it took advantage of the nation's fragmented authority. Yemenis returning from the fighting in Afghanistan began setting up training camps in the late 1980s and bin Laden recognized the fertile ground for al-Qaeda in Yemen and even considered moving his base of operations there. Though the move of the base never came to fruition, Yemenis are still estimated to be the third-largest nationality represented in al-Qaeda, behind only Egyptians and Algerians.<sup>47</sup>

In 1990, the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen united to form the Republic of Yemen, with President Ali Abdullah Saleh becoming president, though unity did not bring greater stability. Hostilities broke out between the central government and those who attempted to reestablish southern independence in 1994. President Saleh was able to quell the rebellion much because of his ability to acquire the help of Islamist fighters who wanted to defeat the atheist communists. The Afghan alumni viewed the campaign as an extension of the war in Afghanistan against the Soviets, as the north represented Islamic leanings, and the south a Marxist regime. After the northern victory, President Saleh rewarded the Afghan alumni by incorporating their leaders, such as al-Zindani, who had formed the Islamic Islah party, into the government.<sup>48</sup> The government allowed the al-Qaeda element in Yemen to operate freely during the 1990s and early 2000s. While Western interests were suffering attacks at the hands of Islamic terrorists in the region, there was a question as to what the true relationship between the Yemeni government and al-Qaeda consisted of.

From 1992 until the dismantling of the al-Qaeda leadership in Yemen in 2003, Yemen served as a location to conduct attacks against the West, especially United States' interests. Al-Qaeda's first official attack took place in December of 1992, in Aden, Yemen. Bin Laden decided to organize a series of attacks against U.S. targets in Yemen,

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<sup>47</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror*, 74–75.

<sup>48</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 113.

mainly in response to U.S. intervention in the Horn of Africa and in Somalia, particularly. The plan was to detonate explosives “at hotels in Aden where American military personnel usually stayed, as well as attacks against U.S. targets at the Aden airport and seaport.”<sup>49</sup> Bin Laden decided to use a Yemeni al-Qaeda affiliate group, Islamic Jihad of Yemen to conduct the operations. The Islamic Jihad of Yemen was founded from the influence of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and many of their members had fought in Afghanistan. They shared the same objectives of al-Qaeda leadership in Sudan, wished to establish an Islamic state in Yemen and rid the Arabian Peninsula of foreign influences. On 29 December 1992, explosions at the Aden Hotel and the Golden Moor Hotel killed three, and wounded five.<sup>50</sup> The bombs were “intended to kill U.S. troops en route to Somalia on a U.S. relief mission, but the troops had already left the premises.”<sup>51</sup> Another terrorist cell was detained near the fence of the Aden Airport as it was about to launch RPG rockets against U.S transport planes parked there. Bin Laden was satisfied with the Aden attacks as he believed they conveyed the message to the U.S. and served as a warning against American involvement in the Muslim world.<sup>52</sup>

The next major attempted attack against Western interests in Yemen occurred in December 1998 by the Islamic Army of Aden (IAA), another local al-Qaeda affiliate group, who had splintered from the Islamic Jihad of Yemen. On 23 December, three terrorists were arrested in a car loaded with explosives on their way to conduct an attack against the British consulate. As a result of the interrogation, three other cell members were arrested and a safe house was captured that contained mines, rocket launchers, computers, and encrypted communication means. Further investigation showed that they had planned a series of attacks against British and American targets inside Yemen. They planned “attacks on Christmas Eve against Western targets in Aden including the British consulate in Aden, an Anglican Church, and a group of Americans dealing in the removal

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<sup>49</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 121.

<sup>50</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 118.

<sup>51</sup> Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Swetman, *Usama bin Laden's al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network* (Ardsley, NY: Transnational Publishers, Inc., 2001), 39.

<sup>52</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 122.

of mines from Yemen who lived in the ‘Movenpick’ Hotel in Aden.”<sup>53</sup> The attacks were thwarted before they could take place, but the IAA was still able to conduct a major attack five days later.

Shortly after the spoiled Christmas Eve attack, 16 Western tourists (12 British, 2 American, and 2 Australian) were kidnapped while touring the Abyan Province in Yemen 60 kilometers northeast of Aden. Their convoy was attacked by an armed group, and on 29 December 1998, a spokesman for the IAA stated his organization had kidnapped the tourists and demanded several conditions for their release, which included the release of members of their group, the cessation of U.S. and British aggression against Iraq, and the banishment of U.S. presence in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>54</sup> The Yemenis refused to meet the demands of the kidnappers and after Yemeni security forces found their hiding place and stormed the stronghold, three British citizens and one Australian were killed and two other tourists, one of them an American, was wounded. Three of the kidnappers were killed, and three wounded.<sup>55</sup> Though there were over 100 kidnappings of foreign residents in Yemen in the 1990s, this incident was the largest and one of the few that ended in the death of some of the hostages.

The next major successful attack against United States’ interests in Yemen, which brought the spotlight to al-Qaeda in the country, was the bombing of the United States’ destroyer, the USS Cole in the Gulf of Aden. The attack was a “full-fledged Al-Qaeda operation supervised directly by bin Laden, who chose the target, location, and the suicide bombers and provided the money.”<sup>56</sup> The first attempted attack on an American destroyer was on 03 January 2000, when a skiff overloaded with explosives set out to intersect the USS The Sullivans, which was moored in the Aden port for refueling. The attack was unsuccessful, though, because the boat bomb sank shortly after it set out as it

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<sup>53</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 123.

<sup>54</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 124.

<sup>55</sup> “Shootout Ends Yemen Kidnapping, 4 Tourists Die,” *NY Times*, 30 December 1998. nytimes.com: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/30/world/shootout-ends-yemen-kidnapping-4-tourists-die.html?pagewanted=1>.

<sup>56</sup> Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*, 87.

was overloaded with explosives and exceeded its load capacity. The miscalculation by the al-Qaeda operatives caused a 10-month postponement of the attack on the high-profile U.S. target.<sup>57</sup> On 12 January 2000, a fiberglass boat, filled with over a half a ton of explosives, was steered into the USS Cole by two al-Qaeda operatives while making friendly gestures to the crew. The blast ripped a hole in the side of the destroyer killing the 17 U.S. sailors, as well as the 2 al-Qaeda operatives, and wounded 40 others.<sup>58</sup>

Two other major al-Qaeda attacks occurred in Yemen before al-Qaeda was nearly destroyed in the country in 2003. The first attack was against the French oil tanker Limburg on 06 October 2002. Much like the attack on the USS Cole, a small boat bomb approached the Limberg, which was moored several miles off the Yemeni coast, and collided with the ship causing a huge explosion, setting the ship on fire, and injuring 12 of the crew and killing one.<sup>59</sup> The attack caused thousands of barrels of oil to spill into the ocean, producing severe environmental consequences. The attack also hurt the economy because of the drop in port usage and hikes in insurance rates because of the threat in the area. The last attack against Western targets in Yemen, before al-Qaeda was thwarted for several years, was when a Yemeni militant entered a hospital in south Yemen and killed three American doctors in December of 2002.<sup>60</sup>

After the attack on the USS Cole, the Yemeni government was slow to cooperate with the United States in their investigation; the U.S. believed that Yemeni's security apparatus was infiltrated by al-Qaeda and that the country was a safe haven for al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Yemen's unwillingness to cooperate marked a low point in U.S. confidence in Yemen as a counter-terrorism partner, but after the 11 September attacks against the U.S., the Yemeni government made a change in course and offered their assistance to the global war on terror. The Yemeni government, under President Saleh, may have begun cooperation for fear it would become a target of the war against

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<sup>57</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror*, 78.

<sup>58</sup> Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Islamic Terror*, 128.

<sup>60</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror*, 80.

terrorism, like the Taliban in Afghanistan. Whatever the case may be, the Yemeni government began cracking down on terrorism and arresting anyone suspected of having ties to al-Qaeda. The United States increased its training and operational support to the Yemeni military, and terrorist attacks against U.S. embassies were foiled in 2001 and 2002.<sup>61</sup> The Yemeni government worked closely with U.S. intelligence services, “coordinating the November 2002 strike on al-Qa’ida’s head in Yemen, ‘Ali Qa’id al-Harithi, which was conducted by an unmanned CIA drone.”<sup>62</sup> Throughout 2003, Yemen’s counter-terrorism unit captured 92 high-value targets, including al-Harithi’s successor, Muhammad Hamdi al-Ahdal in November of the year.<sup>63</sup> After the success of dismantling the al-Qaeda leadership in Yemen in 2002–2003, by the end of 2003 the Yemeni government and the U.S. seemed to consider the counter-terrorism mission complete, and each turned its attention elsewhere.

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<sup>61</sup> Knights, “U.S. Embassy Bombing in Yemen: Counterterrorism Challenges in Weak States.”

<sup>62</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “Al-Qa’ida in Yemen’s 2008 Campaign,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 1, no. 5 (April 2008): 2.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Knights, “Jihadist Paradise – Yemen’s Terrorist Threat Re-emerges,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 15 May 2008.

### **III. AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA (AQAP)**

The war against al-Qaeda in Yemen can be characterized by two distinct phases. The near destruction of al-Qaeda in Yemen by the end of 2003 marked the end of the first phase of war against al-Qaeda in the nation. After the success against the terrorist organization, the Yemeni government and the United States turned their attention elsewhere. Al-Qaeda looked largely defeated in Yemen with most of “the group’s leadership dead or in jail, its infrastructure largely destroyed and the militants still at large more attracted to the fighting in Iraq than to a dying jihad at home.”<sup>64</sup> Yemen, who historically has seen Islamic militancy as more of a Western problem than that of a problem of its state, turned its focus to the internal dilemmas that they faced. It began focusing its resources on the Houthi Rebellion in the northern part of the country and the threats of secession from southern Yemen. The Yemeni leadership saw these problems as security issues that actually challenged the existence of its regime, whereas al-Qaeda did not.

The United States turned its attention away from the threat of al-Qaeda in Yemen as well, focusing on the two wars it was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. After the al-Qaeda threat in Yemen was considered eliminated, the United States prioritized democratic reforms and anti-corruption campaigns in Yemen under the Bush administration. In November 2005, the United States suspended Yemen from the USAID program, and World Bank cut aid from \$420 million a year to \$280 million a year because of rampant corruption throughout the government.<sup>65</sup> The threat of al-Qaeda in Yemen was ignored, and when the organization was inactive in the country it went unnoticed, but when al-Qaeda made a reemergence in Yemen in 2006, the lapse in caution against the terrorist group turned out to be a serious miscalculation.

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<sup>64</sup> Gregory Johnsen, “Al-Qaeda in Yemen,” (Speaker at event at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 07 July 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Johnsen, “Al-Qaeda in Yemen,” (Speaker at event at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 07 July 2009).

To understand the reincarnation of al-Qaeda in Yemen, or al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as it is known today, it is necessary to study the make-up of the organization, its grievances and ideology, and its links to transnational jihadists, as well the message the organization is disseminating. Studying, also, the strategy and goals of the al-Qaeda organization in Yemen may produce answers as to how the United States and other interested nations could combat the dangerous threat. The following section examines each of the topics listed in order to gain a better grasp on what Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is capable of and how their aspirations can be thwarted.

#### **A. REEMERGENCE, GRIEVANCES, AND GOALS**

The reemergence of al-Qaeda in Yemen began when 23 al-Qaeda operatives escaped the PSO Central Prison in Sanaa through a tunnel connected to a mosque on 03 February 2006. This event can be seen as the start of the second phase in the war against al-Qaeda in Yemen, a war that is still ongoing today. Many of the escapees were Afghanistan veterans, members of the Harithi network, and had been involved in attacks against the West, though most were being held without being charged for any specific crimes. After the escape, the United States put tremendous pressure on the Yemeni government to track down and capture Jamal al-Badawi and Jabir al-Banna, who were both on the United States' most-wanted list, but it was two escapees that the United States did not know about who would rekindle al-Qaeda in Yemen. The two escapees who would become the leaders of the al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen were Nasir al-Wahayshi and Qasim al-Raymi. Since the outbreak from prison, these two leaders have led and expanded the al-Qaeda organization in Yemen and have been the main force behind attacks against Western interests inside of Yemen.<sup>66</sup>

Both leaders of AQAP have ties to Afghanistan, and today, share a strong ideological connection to the al-Qaeda leadership there. The man at the front of AQAP, Nasir al-Wahayshi, is a 33-year-old Yemeni from the province of al-Baida. He studied in religious institutes before leaving Yemen for Afghanistan in 1996, eventually serving as

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<sup>66</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, "AQAP in Yemen and the Christmas Day Terrorist Attack," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* Special Issue (January 2010), 2.



bin Laden's secretary. Al-Wahayshi fought at the Battle of Tora Bora before fleeing to Iran, where he was arrested by Iranian authorities and then extradited to Yemen in 2003. He remained in a Yemeni prison until his escape in February of 2006. Qasim al-Raymi, who serves as the military chief in AQAP, has a history similar to al-Wahayshi's. Al-Raymi is a 32-year-old Yemeni from Sanaa, who also fought in Afghanistan and claims to have met bin Laden as well.<sup>67</sup> Upon his return to Yemen, he was arrested in connection with a series of explosions in Sanaa in 2002 and charged with being a member of a cell planning to attack five embassies in Sanaa. He was sentenced to five years in prison before escaping along with al-Wahayshi.<sup>68</sup> A third leader, who plays an important role in AQAP, is Said al-Shihri. Al-Shihri is a 36-year-old Saudi and is al-Wahayshi's deputy in the organization. He also traveled to Afghanistan in 2000 and served as an al-Qaeda facilitator in Iran. He was arrested in 2001 near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and was later transferred to the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In November 2007, he was transferred to Saudi Arabia, where he participated in their terrorist rehabilitation program. Upon graduating the program, he left for Yemen and has been there since the beginning of 2009.<sup>69</sup> Under the leadership of these men, AQAP has been rebuilt from almost complete destruction in 2003, mostly because its message is resonating with part of the Yemeni population.

Since the start of the second phase, al-Qaeda has gone through three clear stages of development in Yemen. The first stage began after the escape from prison and lasted throughout 2007 and consisted of when "al-Wahayshi and al-Raymi worked to resurrect the organization up from the ashes, essentially taking a long view of their project in Yemen and laying a durable foundation."<sup>70</sup> The second stage began in January 2008, when the group launched their bi-monthly online journal *Sada al-Malahim* (Echo of Battles) and followed it with attacks throughout the rest of 2008. The third stage began

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<sup>67</sup> Barak Barfi, "Yemen on the Brink?" *New America Foundation*, Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper (January 2010), 2–3.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory Johnsen, "Qasim al-Raymi: II," *Waq al-Waq* (15 January 2010), [http://islamandinsurgencyinyemen.blogspot.com/2010\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://islamandinsurgencyinyemen.blogspot.com/2010_01_01_archive.html).

<sup>69</sup> Barfi, "Yemen on the Brink?" 3.

<sup>70</sup> Johnsen, "AQAP in Yemen and the Christmas Day Terrorist Attack," 2.

in January 2009 when the group became a regional organization by merging with the Saudi Arabian branch of al-Qaeda to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).<sup>71</sup> AQAP has evolved as an organization since the merger of the Yemeni and Saudi branch, and though a regional organization, through the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a Northwest Airlines flight to Detroit, they have proven they are capable of global attacks.

The first stage of the reemergence of al-Qaeda within Yemen consisted of a renewal of attacks against Western interests shortly after the prisoners escaped as the organization aimed to rebuild and make itself relevant in the country once again.<sup>72</sup> The first was dual failed suicide bombings against oil and gas facilities in Marib and Hadramawt in September of 2006. This early failure was soon eclipsed by a more professional attack on 02 July 2007 in the governorate of Marib. A suicide bomber attacked a convoy of Spanish tourists, killing nine people. The attacks showed that the new generation of al-Qaeda inside of Yemen is intent on attacking Western interests, and is not afraid of another government crackdown like what happened after the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000 and the 11 September bombings in 2001.<sup>73</sup> The first stage of development of al-Qaeda in Yemen transitioned into the second phase as it began to build a stronger foundation and disseminate its agenda throughout the region through the publication of *Sada al-Malahim*.

Since the publication of the first issue of *Sada al-Malahim* in January 2008, the online journal has been used as a propaganda machine for the organization. The journal, which usually runs between 50 and 70 pages, is

More than just a religious journal that praises the glories and duties of jihad. It details tactics to stymie interrogation techniques, runs reviews of assault rifles, analyzes the causes of the recent American recession, and even quotes political analyst Pat Buchanan.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Johnsen, "AQAP in Yemen and the Christmas Day Terrorist Attack, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Johnsen, "The Expansion Strategy of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula," 8.

<sup>73</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, "Yemen Attack Reveals Struggle Among Al-Qaeda's Ranks," *The Jamestown Foundation*, Terrorism Focus 4, no. 22 (07 July 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Barfi, "Yemen on the Brink?" 6.

AQAP uses the online journal to disseminate their goals and strategy, and most of the contributors are either members of AQAP or their relatives. What makes *Sada al-Malahim* different from other publications that al-Qaeda affiliates have published is that it is the first to be put out on a reasonably reliable schedule over the last two years. As of March 2010, there have been twelve publications and throughout the different sections of the journal there are

published interviews with terrorist leaders, fighter biographies, tips on how to become a better al-Qaida foot soldier, lists of terrorists held by the Yemeni government, and thought pieces on the role of women in jihad. It also publishes fan mail.<sup>75</sup>

Most importantly, AQAP uses the magazine to exploit local grievances and the group's stance on many issues is popular with much of the population.

AQAP, under the leadership of al-Wahayshi, has been able to resonate with the population because it has been able to tie itself into the larger jihadist framework while tailoring its narrative to the local audience. The leadership has developed an astounding ability to finesse its ideological message to relate to different audiences within the Arabian Peninsula. One issue of the online journal discussed a recently published list of Saudi Arabia's most wanted terrorists and the alleged rape of Muslims by U.S. soldiers in Iraq.<sup>76</sup> By linking the two events, the group was able to tie the atrocities of the West to the governments they believe to be apostate. AQAP also frequently alleges that its men have been tortured in Yemeni prisons and exploits this issue with the local tribes who are also weary of the Yemeni government. Another article in *Sada al-Malahim* linked oil extraction to tribal concerns, arguing that oil in Shabwa, Hadramawt, and Marib was being exploited by the government and the West at the expense of the local population.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Brian Palmer, "It's Like Slate for Terrorists, What's in al-Qaida's Web magazine?" *Slate* (28 December 2009) <http://www.slate.com/id/2239994>.

<sup>76</sup> Brian O'Neill, "AQAP a Rising Threat in Yemen," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 2, no. 4 (April 2009): 18.

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Phillips and Rodger Shanahan, "Al-Qa'ida, Tribes and Instability in Yemen," *Lowry Institute for International Policy* (November 2009): 6.

AQAP, through *Sada al-Malahim*, seeks supporters by discussing problems that afflict Muslims everywhere, but its true target audience is Yemenis and Saudis. It focuses on the socioeconomic difficulties in the two societies while combining its effort with a religious flavor. In Yemen, AQAP “emphasizes the nation’s widespread poverty while lamenting the increased prices for basic staples.”<sup>78</sup> It claims that the president and those around him are to blame for the corruption in the country and the squandering of Yemen’s natural oil wealth and that the interests of the state do not concern the government, whose only interest is remaining in power. The group has also stated that it will not rest until the last unbeliever has been driven from the Arabian Peninsula. AQAP urges Yemenis to join its cause and justifies its position on attacking Westerners from a famous *hadith* urging Muslims to expel polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>79</sup> The grievances that AQAP focuses on are striking different parts of Yemeni society as it is the most representative organization in Yemen. AQAP transcends class, tribe, and regional identity in a way that no other organization or political party in Yemen is able to, and their success should be very alarming to the United States, and other Western countries.<sup>80</sup>

Through *Sada al-Malahim*, AQAP has been able to match its words with action. Each release of the first few issues of the publication was followed by an attack and the journal provides justifications that “are both political and theological, and manages to target both what they see as the apostate regime of Ali Abdullah Salih and the far devil of Islam’s western enemies.”<sup>81</sup> The first issue of *Sada al-Malahim*, in January 2008, was immediately followed by an attack on a convoy of Belgian tourists that killed two Yemenis and two Belgians. Upon the dissemination of their second issue of the magazine, another attention-grabbing attack took place when the U.S. embassy in Sanaa was the target of three mortars that fell short of the embassy, killing a Yemeni guard and

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<sup>78</sup> Barfi, “Yemen on the Brink?” 7.

<sup>79</sup> Barfi, “Yemen on the Brink?” 7.

<sup>80</sup> Johnsen, “Al-Qaeda in Yemen,” (Speaker at event at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 07 July 2009).

<sup>81</sup> O’Neill, “AQAP a Rising Threat in Yemen,” 18.

wounding several girls at a school located nearby.<sup>82</sup> The attack was the first of three indirect fire attacks against Western compounds in Sanaa between March and April of 2008. In 2008, it favored the policy of a constant offense of small attacks against tourist convoys, army checkpoints, oil fields, and housing compounds for foreigners because it knows that no one major attack will force Westerners to leave Yemen. The culmination of attacks against Western interests came on 17 September 2008 when al-Qaeda affiliates attempted to storm the U.S. embassy in Sanaa. The attack consisted of two suicide car bomb attempts and failed to breach the embassy wall before a four-man team rushed the embassy disguised as local security forces and wearing suicide bomb vests. The attackers failed to breach the U.S. embassy, but seventeen people were left dead, including one American woman.<sup>83</sup> The attacks during 2008 showed that al-Qaeda within Yemen had been able to rebuild and was intent on attacking Western interests inside Yemen, and its objectives only seemed to grow from there.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen and the Saudi al-Qaeda branch announced their merger to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in January 2009 under the leadership of Nasir al-Wahayshi. Al-Wahayshi's counterparts in Saudi Arabia pledged allegiance to him, and this event has shown that Yemen has risen to ascendancy on al-Qaeda's target list. Al-Wahayshi's close ties to bin Laden may allow al-Wahayshi to "steer the organization in the direction that al-Qa'ida central would wish without the need for explicit direction from Pakistan's tribal areas."<sup>84</sup> Under the leadership of al-Wahayshi in 2009, AQAP made tremendous strides in rebuilding the organization, clarifying its goals, and resonating with the population in Yemen. When combined with the Saudi branch of al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in Yemen went from a local al-Qaeda affiliate to a major regional branch of the organization. AQAP's strength, growing ability to conduct major attacks, and sheer desire to attack Western interests was proven throughout 2009, and once again, Yemen gained the attention of the world because of terrorist activity.

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<sup>82</sup> Johnsen, "Al-Qa'ida in Yemen's 2008 Campaign," 3.

<sup>83</sup> Knights, "U.S. Embassy Bombing in Yemen: Counterterrorism Challenges in Weak States."

<sup>84</sup> Phillips Shanahan, "Al-Qa'ida, Tribes and Instability in Yemen," 5.

In 2009, AQAP conducted several major attacks, and through its actions have shown that its objectives are not only to attack Western interests in the Arabian Peninsula, but that it is willing and able to attack globally. On 15 March 2009, AQAP struck a group of tourists once again. A suicide bomber killed four South Koreans along with their Yemeni guide and just three days later, a suicide bomber targeted the South Korean delegation sent to investigate the previous attack. AQAP claimed they were killed partly in revenge for their government's cooperation against Islamic terrorism as well as the role tourists have in corrupting Muslims morals. It does seem that the justifications for the attack came afterwards, though. An important take away from the two attacks was the fact it was the first time an al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist in Yemen used his body as a weapon. It shows that AQAP is learning from tactics used elsewhere and is using other means of terrorism to conduct their operations.<sup>85</sup> In August 2009, AQAP launched what would have been a high profile assassination if it had succeeded. A suicide bomber approached Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism chief and deputy minister of the interior, with PETN explosives in his rectum, and then detonated the explosives as he neared bin Nayef. The attack was unsuccessful though because it was believed that his body absorbed most of the explosion, and bin Nayef survived.<sup>86</sup> The Christmas Day bomber would use a similar tactic in late 2009.

AQAP's goals remain the same as its parent organization in Pakistan in repelling foreigners from Muslim lands and establishing an Islamic Caliphate, but its focus is on the Arabian Peninsula. The August 2009 edition of the online journal asserted that its "main goal was to unseat the regime in Saudi Arabia, noting that Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh's grasp on power was weakening."<sup>87</sup> It is seeking to destroy the existing political system and establish its own, and has called on skilled laborers to help establish an Islamic state in Yemen. A weakened Yemeni government provides AQAP with the

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<sup>85</sup> O'Neill, "AQAP a Rising Threat in Yemen," 17–18.

<sup>86</sup> Johnsen, "AQAP In Yemen and the Christmas Day Attack," 2.

<sup>87</sup> Sarah Phillips, "What Comes Next in Yemen?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* Carnegie Paper Number 107 (March 2010): 3.

area to recruit and build the groundwork for the future. The concern for the U.S. is AQAP's ability to create a framework in which to operate should the al-Qaeda leadership be forced to flee their hideouts in Pakistan and move to Yemen as their next base of operations. Al-Qaeda could spin the move as a win for its organization because it was able to survive an onslaught by the most powerful nation in the world and was still a viable organization, arguing that God must be on its side. American officials are reporting that they are seeing the first evidence of dozens of al-Qaeda operatives and some of the group's leaders leaving Pakistan's tribal areas and moving to Yemen and Somalia.<sup>88</sup> Though none of the al-Qaeda leaders are top leaders, the report suggests that Yemen is becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda members and that their ability to resonate with the population to create areas to operate from should be cause for major concern for both the Yemeni government and the United States.

## **B. YEMENI TRIBES**

AQAP has been very successful recently in linking itself with the tribal elements in Yemen. In the past, al-Qaeda has not had strong alliances with the tribes in Yemen, but recently, the piety of al-Qaeda members has resonated with tribesmen. AQAP has learned from the mistakes made by other al-Qaeda affiliates in other regions in the Middle East and worked carefully to cultivate ties to the local population. For example, in Iraq, the local al-Qaeda affiliates "tortured and executed local men who refused to fight with them. They assassinated top tribal leaders working with the U.S. backed government."<sup>89</sup> The tribes ultimately rebelled against the organization and drove al-Qaeda out of the safe havens it was operating in. By building strong relationships with different tribes in Yemen, AQAP has areas to train and operate and the tribe provides protection from government troops. AQAP has been able to integrate into the tribal regions of Yemen most notably by attempting to marry into local tribes. In the August 2009 edition of *Sada al-Malahim*, a congratulatory notice was inserted announcing the

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<sup>88</sup> Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger, "Some in Qaeda Leave Pakistan for Somalia and Yemen," *The New York Times*, 12 June 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/world/12terror.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Levinson and Margaret Coker, "Al Qaeda's Deep Tribal Ties Make Yemen a Terror Hub," *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 January 2010, 1.

marriage of one of AQAP's leaders and a local tribeswoman.<sup>90</sup> AQAP is establishing roots in Yemen from which it can expand its capability to recruit locals. The more intertwined with the tribes AQAP becomes, the more difficult it is going to be counter its threat without causing a larger crisis.

AQAP has also attempted to appeal to tribal honor to gain the support of the important tribesmen. AQAP's al-Raymi has suggested that any tribal sheikh who supports the president does not represent Yemeni tribes and betrays his forefathers. Al-Wahayshi has called on the tribes to resist the pressure of granting state control of their territories and even al-Qaeda's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has called on Yemen's tribes to support their cause:

I call on the noble and defiant tribes of the Yemen and tell them: don't be less than your brothers in the defiant Pushtun and Baluch tribes who aided Allah and His Messenger and made America and the Crusaders dizzy in Afghanistan and Pakistan... noble and defiant tribes of the Yemen...don't be helpers of Ali Abdullah Salih, the agent of the Crusaders... be a help and support to your brothers the Mujahideen.<sup>91</sup>

Yemen is not a very modern state, and it is very weak in many parts of the nation where the tribal elements live. Yemen lacks strong institutions to provide for the citizens' needs and instead it relies on the patronage system to satisfy them. Just because the government cannot enforce law in many parts of their country, does not mean law does not exist. Tribes have their own system of governance and play a very important role in Yemeni society. The "tribal sheikhs are pillars in both the traditional and the patronage systems, although in the latter the regime detaches them from the communities by offering wealth and status in exchange for political acquiesce."<sup>92</sup> In some areas, AQAP is attempting to detach the sheikhs who have been co-opted by the government and blame the state's violence against the tribes on tribal sheikhs who have turned against their responsibilities and traditions to defend the tribe. As the economic resources of the

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<sup>90</sup> Levison and Coker, "Al Qaeda's Deep Tribal Ties Make Yemen a Terror Hub," 1.

<sup>91</sup> Phillips, "What Comes Next in Yemen?" 4.

<sup>92</sup> Phillips, "What Comes Next in Yemen?" 2.



government dwindle, it is going to have less and less ability to support its patronage systems and the tribes are more likely to aid AQAP fugitives.

AQAP also uses local grievances to build support by focusing on the fact that the government provides little for them, even though most oil revenues derive from their areas. AQAP has begun providing basic services to the locals who have been neglected by the government. It has “dug wells for the community, paid for medical treatments for locals, and is even paying monthly allowances to poor widows in the community.”<sup>93</sup> It is not known how widespread AQAP’s social welfare efforts are, but its growing ability to provide services that the government cannot provide should be cause for great concern. There was even one report that stated tribesmen in Shabwa were so frustrated by the government’s efforts to supply them with teachers for their schools, they turned to AQAP. Groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have used the ability to provide social services to the people as a great tool to garner support for their organizations, as well as recruit members for their cause against what they believe to be illegitimate regimes. Through their shared experiences, marrying into the tribes, and political and ideological messages resonating with Yemeni tribes, AQAP is creating a sphere of influence where the Yemeni government has no control. The strengthening of a relationship between AQAP and the tribes causes even greater concern because any attempt by the government to quell the terrorist organization in the future may turn into a war of the Yemeni government versus the tribesmen.<sup>94</sup> AQAP understands the tribal role in Yemen and is doing much to exploit the distrust of the government, by the tribesmen, in an attempt to further gain an area where they can operate as they wish.

### **C. COMPOSITION**

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is a regional organization, and its composition of members reflects that. Though no one knows the exact number of AQAP in Yemen, the foreign minister for Yemen said he thought that around 200–300 al-Qaeda members

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<sup>93</sup> Levinson and Coker, “Al Qaeda’s Deep Tribal Ties Make Yemen a Terror Hub,” 1.

<sup>94</sup> Johnsen, “The Expansion Strategy of Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula,” 9.

were operating inside Yemen, though many more support it.<sup>95</sup> According to a report in the *Terrorism Monitor*, Yemenis form the majority with 56 percent, followed by Saudis at 37 percent, and foreigners make up roughly 7 percent of the organization inside Yemen.<sup>96</sup> The Yemeni recruits are equally distributed between northern and southern tribes and “al-Qaeda’s area of influence forms a large triangle that is half the size of the country.”<sup>97</sup> Yemen has become a destination for Saudi jihadis as well, after the Saudi crackdown on the organization following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. AQAP is attempting to recruit from southern Saudi Arabia to the south of Yemen and the tribal ties it is creating are helping it to do so. In most of the areas Yemen is recruiting, tribes are still in control and, as stated above, the ability of their message to resonate with the tribal population has helped al-Qaeda build a safe haven at the strategic level in Yemen.<sup>98</sup> The organization also benefited from the government’s overreaction after 9/11, arresting any citizen suspected of having ties to al-Qaeda. When released, these young men were often more radical than when they entered prison and were easy recruits for AQAP upon their exit from incarceration. The Yemeni government also pushed many Yemenis to join AQAP after it was released that the government allowed the United States to carry out the attack in Yemen that killed al-Harithi. The more successful the organization is in conducting attacks the more recruits it is going to be able to enlist to join its cause.<sup>99</sup> The large recruiting pool of unsatisfied Yemeni citizens and the ability to build relationships with the tribal elements in Yemen have made AQAP a formidable terrorist organization whose capacity to conduct attacks against the Yemeni government and Western interests has grown over time.

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<sup>95</sup> “Western counter-terrorism help ‘not enough for Yemen,’” *BBC News* (29 December 2009) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8433844.stm>.

<sup>96</sup> Murad Batal al-Shishani, “An Assessment of the Anatomy of al-Qaeda in Yemen: Ideological and Social Factors,” *Terrorism Monitor* VII, no. 9 (05 March 2010): 6.

<sup>97</sup> Shishani, “An Assessment of the Anatomy of al-Qaeda in Yemen: Ideological and Social Factors,” 6.

<sup>98</sup> Shishani, “An Assessment of the Anatomy of al-Qaeda in Yemen: Ideological and Social Factors,” 7–8.

<sup>99</sup> Johnsen, “Al-Qa’ida in Yemen’s 2008 Campaign,” 2–3.

## D. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On 25 December 2009, Yemen was once again put center stage in the war against al-Qaeda after the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. The suspect, a 23-year-old Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, was overpowered by other passengers in an unsuccessful attempt to detonate explosives sewn into his underwear while the plane was approaching Detroit. Abdulmutallab received training, and may have received the explosives in Yemen under the guidance of AQAP, weeks before the attempted attack.<sup>100</sup> Abdulmutallab had studied at El Eman University in Sanaa at the same time radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki was giving lectures at the school in 2004 and 2005. Abdulmutallab returned to Yemen last summer, where it is believed he headed to AQAP training camps. He left Yemen on 04 December 2009, but before he left, he went to Shabwa Province, a rugged area, where AQAP is believed to be operating from, to meet members of the organization.<sup>101</sup>

The attempted attack was significant because it was the first attack by AQAP that was attempted outside of the Arabian Peninsula. Most experts before the attack believed that AQAP did not have this capability, and their focus would be against Western targets inside their region. The attack shows that the AQAP is growing in capability, and is willing to go after the U.S. on their own territory. The leaders of AQAP have preached taking the fight to Western countries, but it seems the organization's capability may have finally matched their ambition. In a recent issue of *Sada al-Malahim*, al-Wahayshi "urged his followers to use small bombs 'in airports in the Western crusade countries that participated in the war against Muslims; or on their planes, or in their residential complexes or their subways.'" <sup>102</sup> Al-Wahayshi's deputy, al-Shihri has also called on Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula to wage jihad against Christians and Jews in the

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<sup>100</sup> Eric Schmitt and Scott Shane, "Christmas Bombing Try Is Hailed By Bin Laden," *NY Times*, 25 January 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Yemen Says Bomb Suspect Met With al-Qaeda Figures," *NY Times*, 08 January 2010, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Jet Plot Shows Growing Ability of Qaeda Affiliated," *NY Times*, 30 December 2009.

Arabian Peninsula and to blockade the Red Sea to cut off U.S. shipments to Israel.<sup>103</sup> AQAP's new generation of leaders are intent on attacking the U.S. and its interests, wherever they may be, and unlike other terrorist threats, so far AQAP has been able to match their words to actions and, thus, the U.S. as well as other Western countries, should act to halt the growth of the organization and eliminate it from Yemen.

The U.S. government recognized the threat in Yemen from AQAP shortly before the Christmas Day attack. In the two weeks before the Christmas attack, the United States and Yemen "coordinated a trio of strikes against al-Qa'ida targets in the country."<sup>104</sup> The United States was reported to have provided firepower, intelligence, and other support to the government of Yemen to strike at the al-Qaeda hideouts.<sup>105</sup> The attacks were aimed at taking out the leadership of AQAP, but it appears that none of the major leaders of AQAP were captured or killed during the raids. AQAP said that the Christmas Day bombing was in retaliation for the strikes, but it seems highly unlikely based on the timeline of Abdulmutallab's travel. Since the Christmas Day attempted bombing, the U.S. and Yemeni governments have worked together intimately to strike at possible AQAP camps and hideouts and prevent the organization from mounting attacks against U.S. and other foreign targets inside Yemen. In an attack on 14 March 2010, the Yemeni government acknowledged air strikes against al-Qaeda targets in the south of the country. It is not known how effective the Yemeni air strikes are, as local residents have stated that as many as twenty civilians were killed in the latest raid.<sup>106</sup> AQAP is also turning the new fight to thwart its organization as a reason for its own violence against the U.S. and Yemeni governments. Its military commander, al-Raymi, posted a message on a militant Web site that said, "Today, you have attacked us in the middle of our household, so wait for what will befall you in the middle of yours...We will blow up the

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<sup>103</sup> Raissa Kasolowsky, "Top Yemen al-Qaeda Leader threatens U.S. Attacks," *Reuters* (23 February 2010) <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61M1ZR20100223>.

<sup>104</sup> Johnsen, "AQAP in Yemen and the Christmas Day Terrorist Attack," 3.

<sup>105</sup> Thom Shanker and Mark Landler, "U.S. Aids Yemeni Raid on Al Qaeda, Officials Say," *NY Times*, 18 December 2009.

<sup>106</sup> "Yemen says al-Qaeda targets hit," *Al Jazeera* (15 March 2010) <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/03/201031522226607811.html>.

earth from beneath your feet.”<sup>107</sup> Trying to eliminate AQAP elements in Yemen is the correct path to take for the United States, but it must be done along with mitigating the factors that make AQAP a popular choice among the Yemeni population.

The single person who is getting the most attention in the United States, since the reemergence of AQAP in Yemen, is U.S.-born Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. He is believed to have ties to the Christmas Day bomber and U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan, who killed 13 people and wounded 30 others at Ft. Hood in Texas in November 2009. Awlaki’s relationship status to AQAP is unclear, but it appears he may be a part of the spiritual branch of AQAP. He spent most of his life in the United States until leaving in 2002 for England, and then moving to Yemen in 2004. He is from a powerful family in the province of Shabwa, where he is believed to be living under the protection of his tribe. Awlaki can act as the face of Western Muslims because of his understanding of the West, and can be used as a huge recruiting tool to attract other Western Muslims to the organization.<sup>108</sup> Awlaki has even issued a *fatwa*, permitting the killing of American servicemen, and was recently quoted as saying, “I eventually came to the conclusion that jihad (holy struggle) against America is binding upon myself just as it is binding upon every other able Muslim.”<sup>109</sup> His true ties to AQAP are not conclusive though, because he has not published in *Sada al-Malahim* or issued recordings in the name of AQAP. Awlaki’s connection to AQAP stems from his overt promotion of jihad and criticism of the United States, as well as his link to the last two major terrorist attacks against the United States. Awlaki’s relevance to AQAP operations may be minimal, but his capability to relate to Western Muslims could be a major factor in recruiting for the organization.

Since the escape of the twenty-three al-Qaeda members from a Yemeni prison in 2006, al-Qaeda has been able to completely rebuild itself into a formidable organization in Yemen under the AQAP. They are no longer on the run and are able to operate freely in

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<sup>107</sup> Kasolowsky, “Top Yemen al-Qaeda Leader threatens U.S. Attacks.”

<sup>108</sup> Barfi, “Yemen on the Brink?” 3–4.

<sup>109</sup> Cynthia Johnston, “Yemen preacher urges jihad on United States,” *The Washington Post*, 18 March 2010.

many areas. They forced the closing of the U.S. embassy for two days in early January for fear of an imminent attack.<sup>110</sup> AQAP has also caused the U.S. Navy to issue warnings to ships sailing in waters near Yemen because of the threat of seaborne attacks.<sup>111</sup> The al-Qaeda threat in Yemen seems, once again, viable and what strategy the United States and other Western countries will take to combat the threat is going to determine whether AQAP will continue to flourish. The success of the AQAP, under the leadership of al-Wahayshi, has been possible through the message they have been able to disseminate through their online publication *Sada al-Malahim*. Its goals are to rid Muslim lands of Western influence and to weaken the Yemeni government even further so it can have a greater area to operate from. AQAP's message has been aimed at the local population, focusing on grievances that Yemenis face, while at the same time not losing their global jihadist message. The success in building relationships with the Yemeni tribes has also increased its influence in the region while, at the same time, given AQAP an area to maneuver and build its strength. The threat that AQAP poses is growing, and now that it has accomplished the goals of rebuilding, it may look to conduct further attacks globally. The more unstable the Yemeni regime becomes, the easier it is going to be for AQAP to operate, and it opens the possibility of Yemen becoming the next headquarters for the al-Qaeda leadership if it is forced out of the tribal regions of Pakistan. AQAP has been able to rebuild, recruit, and once again become relevant in Yemeni society since their near destruction in 2003. The ability of AQAP's message to resonate with the Yemeni population should not be overlooked, and if they continue to grow in the territories governed by the tribes in Yemen, and take advantage of the weakened Yemeni government, the al-Qaeda organization may have its next nerve center to conduct operations from.

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<sup>110</sup> Jack Healy, "U.S. Reopens Its Embassy After Raids in Yemen," *NY Times*, 06 January 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Bill Gertz, "Navy Warns Ships About Al Qaeda Risk Near Yemen," *Washington Times*, 22 March 2010, 1.

#### IV. CHALLENGES FACING THE YEMENI GOVERNMENT

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has been able to make a remarkable recovery since operations that dismantled their leadership from 2002–2003 because the Yemeni government changed their priorities to combat the other major domestic challenges that they face. Along with the growing threat of AQAP in the country, there are other major domestic challenges that threaten the existence of the regime. The first major challenge facing the Yemeni government is the Houthi rebellion in the northern area of Yemen. A recent cease-fire was put into action on 12 February 2009, and President Saleh said the pact was “a sign that the war has ended and that this is not just a passing truce.”<sup>112</sup> This is not the first cease-fire between the two parties and it is necessary to understand the conflict in northern Yemen that has taken so many resources away from combating AQAP, and which threatens to flare up again. The second major challenge facing the Yemeni government, to date, is the secessionist movement in southern Yemen that stems from grievances from the civil war in 1994. The movement has grown in the last year, and it is threatening the existence of the current state by calling for the separation of North and South Yemen. The third challenge facing the Yemeni government is the convergence of economic and demographic problems that are causing political unrest and instability in the country. Yemen is the poorest state in the Arab world, and the high unemployment is creating a breeding ground for new members of AQAP.

By studying the major challenges that Yemen faces today, we can gain a better understanding as to what conditions have allowed AQAP to reemerge and become a viable threat in Yemen once again. The Yemeni government has focused much of their resources in the last several years against combating the Houthi Rebellion and southern secessionists because they viewed the two challenges as hazards to the existence of their regime. It is no coincidence that during the same time period, AQAP has been able to build itself up from near destruction and become active in Yemen once again. The two major rebellions, along with the economic and demographic challenges, have forced the

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<sup>112</sup> “Yemen declares end to northern war,” *Al Jazeera* (19 March 2010)  
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/03/2010319141622325199.html>.

Yemeni government to change their priorities and overlook the threat of AQAP. These challenges, along with AQAP, have created a nation that is on the verge of disintegrating and must be understood in order to help Yemen overcome the dire consequences that it faces as a country.

#### **A. HOUTHİ REBELLION**

The first major challenge the Yemeni government has faced in the last several years is the Houthi insurgency that started in the province of Saada in northern Yemen. The cause of fighting in the conflict began in 2004 when the government attempted to arrest the leader of the group *Shabab al-Moumineen* (Believing Youth Movement), Hussein al-Houthi, for criticizing the government's ties to Sunni extremists and the United States.<sup>113</sup> Al-Houthi, a Zaydi cleric, urged the Yemeni government to stop supporting the United States in the war on terror and his actions prompted "anti-government demonstrations by members of the Believing Youth Movement. Militants disrupted mosque services in Saada, shouting anti-government, anti-American, and anti-Israeli slogans."<sup>114</sup> The protests moved to the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, and to put a halt to the unrest, President Saleh invited al-Houthi to Sanaa to discuss the grievances of the Believing Youth Movement, as well as those of the Zaydi population in northern Yemen. Al-Houthi refused the invitation to Sanaa, and President Saleh decided to quell the unrest with other measures, by attempting to arrest or destroy the leader.<sup>115</sup> This event started the warfare between the Yemeni government and the Zaydi Shia, and since 2004, the two have gone through six rounds of fighting.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, "Fragility and Extremism in Yemen," 20.

<sup>114</sup> Christopher Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," *Carnegie Papers* No. 102, (September 2009): 14.

<sup>115</sup> Jack Freeman, "The al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab al Moumineen," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 11 (November 2009): 1009.

<sup>116</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, "The Sixth War," *The National Newspaper*, 12 November 2009, <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091112/REVIEW/711129992/1008>.



To understand the extent of the conflict, a brief overview of the Zaydis in Yemen must be given. Zaydis are Shia, but they have little in common with the other Shia groups (like those in Iran), and are sometimes called the 5th Sunni school of jurisprudence. They are sometimes referred to as “fivers” because “they split from the other four Sunni groups over disputes about the legitimacy of the fifth Imam. They are known for being very moderate and the closest to Sunni Islam of all the Shi’a sects.”<sup>117</sup> Zaydis differ from other Shia because after the Imam Ali Zain al-Abidin, the Zaydis recognize his younger son, Zayd, as the next Imam, instead of his older brother, Muhammad al-Baqir. They believe that as long as a man can trace his lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad and has the arms and supporters to ensure his rule, and he can rule justly according to the Koran, he is able to be the Imam.<sup>118</sup> The Zaydis ruled northern Yemen from 893, when the first Yemeni Imamate was established. The Yemeni Imamate lasted over 1,000 years in various forms until the 1962 revolution and the following eight-year civil war. The Saada region was the last region to submit to the republican government and both sides have been skeptical of each other ever since.<sup>119</sup>

The first round of fighting between the government and the Houthis lasted from June to September of 2004, when the Yemeni government attacked Believing Youth Movement strongholds to arrest or kill al-Houthi. Yemeni forces used tanks and warplanes to go after the Zaydi cleric, and the fighting was fierce, with a suspected total death toll of 130 in the first week. He was wanted for “harming Yemen’s stability and interests,” and the Yemeni government eventually succeeded in killing Hussein al-Houthi on 10 September 2004, along with some of his supporters.<sup>120</sup> The Yemeni government considered the rebellion over with the death of al-Houthi, and began their withdrawal, but their belief that the rebellion was taken care of was a miscalculation, as the Believing Youth used the government withdrawal to consolidate its forces. Since September 2004,

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<sup>117</sup> Freeman, “The al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab al Moumineen,” 1012.

<sup>118</sup> Freeman, “The al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab al Moumineen,” 1012.

<sup>119</sup> Johnsen, “The Sixth War.”

<sup>120</sup> Freeman, “The al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab al Moumineen,” 1009.

there have been six rounds of fighting and each successive round has only seemed to inflame the conflict. After the death of Hussein al-Houthi, the movement took the name of their fallen leader and his three brothers assumed the leadership role of the insurgency, while his father became the group's spiritual leader.<sup>121</sup>

Though the fighting erupted due to the targeting of the Believing Youth Movement leader, al-Houthi, the origins of the conflict have deeper roots and are a combination of competing sectarian identities, regional underdevelopment, perceived socioeconomic injustices, and historical grievances. The conflict is worsened by the tensions between the Zaydi Shia population and the Sunni Salafi fundamentalists, who the government has used to help quell the rebellion.<sup>122</sup> Throughout the 1990s, the two religious sects clashed with each other as Salafists “destroyed Zaidi tombs and attempted to convert Zaidi youth.”<sup>123</sup> The Houthis see themselves as defenders of their community against an alliance between the government and the Salafis, an alliance that they see is determined to extinguish their culture. The Houthis do not believe that the president of Yemen, who happens to be a Zaydi Shia, has the right to rule Yemen any longer because he has betrayed his Shia faith, evident in his political favoritism to Sunni members of government. They are against the current Yemeni regime under President Saleh, and any involvement between the government and the United States. By pandering to the United States in allowing the conduct of counter-terrorism operations in Yemen, President Saleh has made himself illegitimate. The Houthi movement believes that a Shia Imam should once again lead Yemen and that it is their responsibility to install the Imamate again by overthrowing the current regime.<sup>124</sup>

Over the course of the five-year conflict, the most effective tactics used by the Zaydi insurgents have been ambushes, sniper attacks, and small to medium-sized bombings, but the insurgents have evolved from purely guerilla warfare to a combination

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<sup>121</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Fragility and Extremism in Yemen,” 20.

<sup>122</sup> Boucek, “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” 15.

<sup>123</sup> Johnsen, “The Sixth War.”

<sup>124</sup> Freeman, “The al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab al Moumineen,” 1012–1013.

of guerilla warfare and urban terrorism. Most of the Yemeni army has seen combat in Saada, and the insurgents have “directed their most vicious military campaign against the Yemeni army and police forces. So far, they have killed at least a thousand Yemeni security services personnel” during the campaign.<sup>125</sup> In May 2008, they attacked a mosque in northern Yemen that was frequented by the Yemeni military, government, and police personnel, including those close to the president. The Yemeni government has sought to combat the insurgency through a strategy of arresting political activists, roadblocks/vehicle checkpoints, artillery and air strikes, and a food blockade. The insurgency has also displaced an estimated 130,000 people.<sup>126</sup> It is also estimated that the number of rebel and civilian dead range from 3,700 to 5,500 and is rising.<sup>127</sup>

The Houthi insurgency has not only caused turmoil in Yemen, but it has also caused controversy throughout the region. The Houthis recently invoked intervention by neighboring Saudi Arabia as three months of fighting, from November 2009 to the end of January 2010, ended in rebel offered cease-fire. The Saudi intervention came after the Houthis “had killed a Saudi border guard and infiltrated a string of villages in early November.”<sup>128</sup> The Houthis attacked the Saudi positions after accusing the kingdom of helping the Yemeni government in its attempt to defeat the rebellion. During the three-month conflict between the Houthis and the Saudis, 109 Saudi soldiers were killed, and over 1,500 Yemenis were captured by Saudi forces.<sup>129</sup> The Yemeni government has also mixed words with Iran, consistently arguing that the Iranian government has supported the Houthi insurgency. Yemen claims that Iran supports the movement monetarily and politically in an attempt to create proxy wars with Saudi Arabia and the United States. There is little evidence that there is any direct Iranian involvement in the Houthi insurgency and one leader of the Houthi rebellion, Abd-al-Malik al-Houthi, has asserted

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<sup>125</sup> Freeman, “The al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab al Moumineen,” 1013.

<sup>126</sup> Boucek, “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” 15.

<sup>127</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Fragility and Extremism in Yemen,” 22.

<sup>128</sup> Jeffrey Fleishman, “Saudis Say Fighting With Yemen Insurgents Has Ceased,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 January 2010.

<sup>129</sup> Fleishman, “Saudis Say Fighting With Yemen Insurgents Has Ceased.”

that Iranian involvement is untrue and that there is no Iranian support and no Iranian weapons are involved in the fighting.<sup>130</sup> It does seem that Iran has provided moral support to the rebels, though, even to go so far as to warn the Saudis not to “pour oil on the fire” by intervening in the Yemeni problem.<sup>131</sup> At the same time the Yemeni government has attempted to link the Houthis to Iran, they have also tried to tie them to both al-Qaeda and the southern secessionists in order to tie their internal security concerns to the larger security threat that has attracted the international community. By doing so, the Yemeni government has tried to portray its campaign against the Houthis in the north as counterterrorism efforts against fundamentalist insurgents in order to garner support for their actions.<sup>132</sup>

The Yemeni government and the Houthis were able to agree to a truce on 12 February 2010, and though minor skirmishes happened shortly after the declared cease-fire, since then both sides have been able to meet the conditions of the agreement. The Houthis accepted the six conditions proposed by the Yemeni government that included freeing all prisoners, opening roads in the north, withdrawing from government buildings, returning weapons seized from security forces, and handing over captured army posts. They have also pledged not to attack Saudi Arabia and to respect and obey the Yemeni constitution.<sup>133</sup> The Yemeni government is also set to free a number of Houthi rebels, estimated at several hundred, in order to implement conditions they agreed to in the cease-fire. The cease-fire to date has been held, but this is not the first time the two sides have agreed to end hostilities in the six years of fighting.

Though both sides have met the conditions of the cease-fire to this point, it is unlikely the truce will last. In June 2007, the Qatar government mediated a joint cease-fire between the Houthis and the Yemeni government and in 2008, the two sides met in

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<sup>130</sup> “Yemen’s Al-Huthi, Saudi Chief Editor Interviewed on Clashes with Saudi Forces,” *Al-Jazirah Satellite Television*, 06 November 2009. Open Source Center.

<sup>131</sup> Scott Peterson, “Does Iran play role in Yemen conflict?” *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 November 2010.

<sup>132</sup> International Crisis Group, “Yemen: Defusing the Sa’dah Time Bomb,” *Middle East Report*, No. 86, (27 May 2009): 10.

<sup>133</sup> “Yemen rebels free prisoners,” *Al Jazeera* (17 March 2010)  
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/03/20103175563951226.html>.

Doha to sign a peace accord. Peace was short lived in both instances, and “renewed heavy fighting soon rendered the peace accord obsolete.”<sup>134</sup> Optimism is hard to sustain about the recent peace agreement because the truce does not address the rebels’ complaints of discrimination and neglect by the government. Until these grievances are addressed, fighting is likely to flare up once again. Even the president of Yemen was quoted as saying, “whenever we stop military operations and release their prisoners, they prepare themselves again for fighting.”<sup>135</sup> If the fighting reignites once again, it will continue to take away resources from combating the threat of AQAP in the country and Yemen cannot spare the estimated \$200 million of foreign currency reserves per month that were being used to fight the Houthis.<sup>136</sup> The Yemeni government will see the Houthi insurgency as a threat to the existence of the government and it will remain the highest priority for the government until it is finally eliminated.

## **B. SOUTHERN SECESSIONISTS**

The second major challenge facing the Yemeni government is secessionists in south Yemen, known as the Southern Movement. What started in 2007 with peaceful protests led by former military officers, who said they were mistreated and denied pensions after the 1994 civil war, has evolved into erratic fighting between southerners and Yemeni security forces.<sup>137</sup> Recent protests in the south have led to deaths during clashes between the southern separatists and security forces, and on 11 March 2010, three separatists were killed and thirteen were wounded during such a confrontation.<sup>138</sup> The escalation of violence is cause for great concern in a country already riddled with other security concerns. Any diversion of resources from the fight to combat AQAP in Yemen hinders any attempt to quell the AQAP threat and allows the terrorist organization more

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<sup>134</sup> International Crisis Group, “Yemen: Defusing the Sa’dah Time Bomb,” 22.

<sup>135</sup> “President: The Country Determines to Eradicate Terrorists in Sa’ada,” *SABA Online*, 20 October 2009. Open Source Center.

<sup>136</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Fragility and Extremism in Yemen,” 22.

<sup>137</sup> Robert F. Worth, “In Yemen’s South, Protests Could Cause More Instability,” *NY Times*, 27 February 2010.

<sup>138</sup> “Yemeni separatists protesters killed,” *Al Jazeera*, (11 March 2010) <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/03/2010311125729623253.html>.

areas to operate freely. The Southern Movement is radicalizing in their ideology and actions, and the Yemeni state needs to resolve the issues between them and the southern separatists before the Movement creates another civil war that threatens the existence of the state.

Since the creation of the unified Yemeni state, there have been problems for residents of the south including “issues of national identity, economic grievances, and concerns over access to political power.”<sup>139</sup> The unity process, after the unification of North and South Yemen, failed to solve basic problems that southerners had and the problems linger today. Citizens in southern Yemen have argued that the northern-led government has marginalized them both socially and economically, and the southern issue resurfaced in September 2007 following the protests by former southern military officers. Along with exclusion from government jobs and services and little economic development, southern leaders believe the north has not stood by commitments to improve conditions in the south after the civil war in 1994.<sup>140</sup> They also claim that the wealth generated from southern oil fields is disproportionately distributed by the regime in an attempt to repress the southern people. Many southerners today perceive themselves to be subject to internal colonialism by the north, and what started as a list of grievances has now escalated to calls for southern secession and the establishment of an independent southern republic.<sup>141</sup>

In 2007 and 2008, the protests in southern Yemen were overwhelmingly peaceful, as the leader of southern military retirees, Nasir Ali an-Nuba, emphasized the need for peaceful, weapons-free sit-ins. The demands of the protests were moderate as well, as the Southern Movement called for equality with citizens in the north, more jobs, more local decision-making power, and more control over southern economic resources. The government responded by arresting an-Nuba and several of his collaborators.<sup>142</sup> As the

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<sup>139</sup> Stephen Day, “The Political Challenge of Yemen’s Southern Movement,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Carnegie Paper Number 108 (March 2010): 1.

<sup>140</sup> Boucek, “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” 16.

<sup>141</sup> Worth, “In Yemen’s South, Protests Could Cause More Instability.”

<sup>142</sup> Day, “The Political Challenge of Yemen’s Southern Movement,” 2, 8–9.

protests grew from hundreds to tens of thousands, the government used greater levels of repression, security crackdowns, arrests, episodes of violence, and the closure of southern newspapers to halt the southern aspirations.<sup>143</sup> In October 2007, security forces shot and killed four men. The next month they killed two more protesters in Aden and, four months later, government forces killed and injured dozens during protests in two southern provinces. The southerners see the repression as just another sign of abuse by the northern regime, which refuses to allow southerners to be equal citizens. As the government has become more repressive of the demonstrations, even moving pieces of heavy artillery and weaponry into the south to squash the opposition, the Southern Movement reacted in kind, and the movement is becoming a violent struggle against the regime.<sup>144</sup>

What began as calls for reform in the context of unity has moved to demands for independence, and these demands are growing more popular in the south. The Southern Movement has become more radicalized and, starting at rallies in 2009, demonstrators began waving the flag of the former South Yemen and calling for secession. One Southern Movement leader, Sahra Saleh Abdullah, has even said it is too late for reforms and that the South has the right to defend itself and form an independent southern state.<sup>145</sup> The movement gained tremendous momentum in April 2009 when one of President Saleh's former allies, Sheikh Tareq al-Fadhli, announced that he was joining the Southern Movement, and was in favor of an independent southern state. The announcement was important because al-Fadhli was a part of Saleh's inner circle in the 1990s and was a Yemeni Afghan who helped Saleh consolidate power after the unification of the country. His joining of the Southern Movement showed the growing disconnect between the south and the northern regime.

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<sup>143</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 16.

<sup>144</sup> April Longley Alley and Abdul al-Iryani, "Southern Aspirations and Salih's Exasperation: The Looming Threat of Secession the South Yemen," *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints* No. 11 (June 2009): 2.

<sup>145</sup> Worth, "In Yemen's South, Protests Could Cause More Instability."

The Southern Movement has no official centralized leadership and, as of January 2010, there were at least five similarly named organizations claiming to represent the southern people.<sup>146</sup> The movement includes a number of powerful tribal figures as well as Aden-based intellectuals and political figures, and there is a 42-member leadership committee, though it is unclear how many people it represents. Most supporters, including Sheikh al-Fadhli, seem to acknowledge Ali Salim al-Bidh, the exiled former president of South Yemen, as their leader.<sup>147</sup> Al-Bidh emerged from years of silence saying that the unification of North and South Yemen had failed and that the south would succeed in regaining their independence no matter the cost.<sup>148</sup> The situation in south Yemen is growing increasingly dangerous, and unless leaders in the south and the regime are able to come to an agreement that satisfies both sides, Yemen is headed towards a civil war that could throw the country into further disarray.

President Saleh and his government have tried to link the southern secessionists to al-Qaeda, much like they have done with the Houthi rebellion, to garner international support for their domestic security problems. Though AQAP's leader, al-Wahayshi, has declared support for the southern cause, southern leaders have rejected any association with AQAP.<sup>149</sup> AQAP's support of the Southern Movement has little to do with the support of their ideological grievances, but they see the movement as another weakening force on the regime and as an opportunity to strengthen and operate without fear of reprisal in the regions they occupy. President Saleh has recently welcomed dialogue with the southern leaders to discuss any political demands, while at the same time increasing the crackdown on the secessionists. He was quoted as saying, "The separatist flags are going to burn in the coming days and weeks," on 8 March 2010, just a day before he called for dialogue.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Day, "The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement," 9.

<sup>147</sup> Worth, "In Yemen's South, Protests Could Cause More Instability."

<sup>148</sup> "South Yemen call for independence," *Al Jazeera*, 27 February 2010, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/02/201022713148544608.html>.

<sup>149</sup> Day, "The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement," 9.

<sup>150</sup> "Yemeni leader in dialogue call," *Al Jazeera*, 09 March 2010, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/03/20103975228357270.html>.



Much like the Houthi rebellion, the Yemeni government sees the Southern Movement as a threat to its existence and is allocating resources towards combating the threat. The longer the dilemma lasts, the more resources are being taken away from the ability to combat the threat of AQAP within the country. The movement is further weakening the Republic of Yemen and allowing AQAP to take advantage of the deteriorating situation.

## **C. ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES**

If the domestic security challenges were not enough for the Yemeni government, they are also facing a myriad of economic and demographic challenges as well. The worsening economic situation makes it more and more difficult to hold the country together. With diminishing resources and a growing population, the government's ability to provide basic services to its people is becoming more complicated and, along with the domestic security challenges that Yemen faces, the regime has a legitimate chance of collapsing in the not-too-distant future. If Yemen reaches the point of collapse and becomes a failed state, AQAP's ability to thrive and operate would be able to grow exponentially. The economic and demographic challenges that Yemen faces cause a serious threat to the stability of the regime and it is necessary to understand them if Yemen is to be strengthened to combat the explosive threat of AQAP within the country.

### **1. Poverty and Unemployment**

Yemen is the poorest state in the Arab world, with an annual per capita income under 900 U.S. dollars and nearly half the population earns less than two dollars per day.<sup>151</sup> About 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and more than half of the children suffer from malnutrition, mainly due to the fact that 5 million Yemenis go hungry each day.<sup>152</sup> The Yemeni economy has never fully recovered from the major events that happened in Yemen and the Gulf in the 1990s. The Yemeni labor

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<sup>151</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 30.

<sup>152</sup> Iris Glosemeyer, "Dancing on Snake Heads in Yemen," *Canadian Defense & Foreign Affairs Institute* (May 2009): 6.

market was unable to absorb the tremendous influx of nearly a million Yemeni migrant workers that were expelled from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states after the Yemeni government's refusal to employ international forces to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Also, the civil war in 1994 not only expended valuable resources, but also damaged the infrastructure of the southern provinces, much of which has not been fixed.<sup>153</sup> The lingering affects of events in the 1990s, along with a weak economy and lack of development, have caused an unemployment rate in Yemen conservatively estimated at 35 percent. The unemployed can be exploited by extremist elements such as AQAP and thus Yemen's economic difficulties help contribute to their security concerns.<sup>154</sup> Yemen's security problems and economic failings are working together in a vicious cycle that only leads Yemen into further turmoil.

## **2. Dwindling Oil Resources**

Oil exports are essential to the Yemeni government, as they generate 75 percent of government revenue. The major problem with oil in Yemen, though, is that it is running out. Oil exports in Yemen have dropped from 450,000 barrels per day in 2003 to around 280,000 barrels per day in January 2009 and the Energy Information Administration expects oil output to decrease even further, to 260,000 barrels per day, in 2010. It is estimated that Yemen has proven crude oil reserves of 3 billion barrels as of January 2010.<sup>155</sup> Many energy experts believe that oil exports for Yemen will cease to exist in a decade and the World Bank estimated that by 2017 the government of Yemen will earn no income from oil. The rapidly decreasing oil reserves, along with the fall in global oil prices, have had a severe impact on the Yemeni economy, and though the increase in oil prices over the last seven years was able to mask the decreasing production, the prices of oil per barrel have decreased since they peaked in 2008.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Glosemeyer, "Dancing on Snake Heads in Yemen," 5.

<sup>154</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 11.

<sup>155</sup> Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Brief: Yemen," (March 2010), 2.  
<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Yemen/pdf.pdf>.

<sup>156</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 4–5.

The government relies heavily on their oil revenues, and when prices peaked at \$147 per barrel in July 2008, it was able to compensate for the decrease in oil production. During the first quarter of 2009, Yemeni sales have averaged \$47 per barrel, and the loss of government revenue is being felt throughout the country. In early 2009, the Finance Ministry ordered budget cuts of 50 percent throughout the whole bureaucracy, but the government also relies heavily on the oil exports to maintain its informal patronage system. It is possible that in the near future the government may not be able to pay the salaries of civil and military personnel.<sup>157</sup> There was interest in licensing for exploration in Yemen's offshore areas in 2007, but the escalation of piracy in the Gulf of Aden in 2008 and 2009 has thwarted such attempts to explore possible offshore oil sites.<sup>158</sup>

The Yemeni economy, which is not in good shape to begin with, is heading towards disintegration. The Yemeni government depends heavily on oil revenues to fund state expenditures and the dwindling oil resources in Yemen are going to further hinder the government's ability to govern its own territory. Yemen is going to be even more dependent on international assistance unless the Yemeni government begins to prepare for a post-oil economy. If the economy is not able to provide jobs for the people, the more likely extremists groups like AQAP are going to be able to recruit, and the security threats and the government's ability to combat them will only worsen.

### **3. Water and Qat Crisis**

Even more worrisome than dwindling oil resources is the fact that Yemen is running out of water. According to government reports, renewable fresh water amounts to 2.5 billion cubic meters, while the annual consumption is 3.4 billion cubic meters.<sup>159</sup> These numbers mean that Yemen is using water faster than it can naturally be replenished. Water is getting harder and harder to come by in Yemen and "the market price of water has quadrupled in the past four years, pushing more and more people to drill illegally into

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<sup>157</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 4–5.

<sup>158</sup> Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Brief: Yemen," 1.

<sup>159</sup> Mohammed al-Qadhi, "Alarm as water taps run dry," *The National*, 24 September 2009. <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090925/FOREIGN/709249878/1135>.

rapidly receding aquifers.”<sup>160</sup> In rural areas, only 45 percent of people get their water from the government, and in the Taiz province, water is supplied by the government only once every 45 days. The lack of supplied water leads people to drill illegal private rigs, which further deplete the water table because there is no regulation on water consumption from these illegal rigs.<sup>161</sup>

The reason for the crisis is the result of several factors, including rising domestic consumption, poor water management, and wasteful irrigation techniques, but a major cause of a depletion of water in Yemen is because of the cultivation of qat. Qat is a stimulant whose leaves are chewed every day by most Yemeni men, and it uses nearly 40 percent of water resources consumed by agriculture.<sup>162</sup> Qat is the easiest way to make a profit for Yemeni farmers, so when they are in need of income, they open up water taps to irrigate the fields. After weeks of irrigation, qat leaves can be harvested and sold the same day, which is much more profitable than other crops. The more water given to the qat plant, the more productive it will be, so there is no incentive to conserve water for other needs. So much land is devoted to qat cultivation that the country’s ability to grow its own food has decreased and Yemen is now a net food importer.<sup>163</sup> The weak economy and qat cultivation go hand in hand, which only makes water problems in the country worse. The lack of water in Yemen, once again, shows the government’s inability to provide basic necessities for its people. Farmers cultivate qat because it is the easiest way to produce a profit in a struggling economy. The economic challenges facing Yemen are magnified by its depleting resources and as the government is able to provide less and less for the people, the Yemeni state is going to weaken even more as the population turns elsewhere to meet its basic needs.

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<sup>160</sup> Robert F. Worth, “Thirsty Plant Dries Out Yemen,” *NY Times*, 01 November 2009.

<sup>161</sup> Al-Qadhi, “Alarm as water taps run dry.”

<sup>162</sup> Sharp, “Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations,” 21.

<sup>163</sup> Boucek, “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” 8.

#### **4. Growing Population**

Along with a failing economy, the demographics in Yemen pose a serious threat to the weakening state. Yemen has a population near 24 million people and is among the world's highest in growth rate, at 3.4 percent. The result is that two-thirds of the population is under the age of 24. The population is expected to double in the next 20 years to over 40 million people, which will only magnify the economic problems they are facing today. The Yemeni labor market already cannot produce enough jobs to satisfy the 25,000 people who enter it each year. As the population expands, and the Yemen economy weakens, more and more Yemenis are going to be without jobs. The growing population will also decrease the water resources even more, and Sanaa may be the first international capital in the world without water.<sup>164</sup>

#### **5. Porous Borders and Culture of Arms**

Another problem facing Yemen is its porous border and culture of arms. Yemen has only limited control over who enters and leaves the country, and "according to the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 74,000 Africans crossed the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea on smugglers' boats and reached the shores of Yemen in 2009."<sup>165</sup> Thousands of Somalis, who flee the war in their home country for Yemen each year, are now a threat to become the next generation of al-Qaeda in Yemen. Yemen's ill-defined borders, vast shoreline, and rugged and inaccessible mountain region makes Yemen's ability to combat human and weapons trafficking very difficult. Yemen is also estimated to have "more than three guns for every citizen," a number that has been generated by years of profitable weapons smuggling through Yemen's porous borders.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 9–11.

<sup>165</sup> Sharp. "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations," 24.

<sup>166</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror*, 74.

## 6. Education

The Yemeni population is spread throughout an estimated 135,000 villages and settlements, with less than one-third of the population living in urban areas. As a result of many of the villages being remote, the Yemeni government has been unable to provide the Yemeni people residing in these villages with basic social services. Due to the lack of basic social services being provided by the government, “many settlements are self-sufficient, providing their own health care centers, schools, and other social services.”<sup>167</sup> There are only about 16,000 schools for the 135,000 villages and settlements and the national literacy rate is about 50 percent, while the female illiteracy rate is nearly 70 percent. Sixty-five percent of the teachers have only a high school degree. The lack of government-run schools has led to the proliferation of religious schools and it is estimated that there may be anywhere from 4,500 to 10,000 religious schools educating the Yemeni youth.<sup>168</sup> The government has little oversight on what is being taught in the religious schools, and in a country trying to prevent the radicalization of its citizens from religious extremists, unregulated religious schools should be cause for major concern.

The economic and demographic challenges facing the Yemeni government are daunting enough alone, but at the same time as a persistent insurgency in the north, and citizens calling for secession in the south, the challenges threaten the existence of the state. The challenges are weakening the state and AQAP could not ask for a better situation in Yemen to attract recruits. The Yemeni population is young, poorly educated, economically depressed, heavily armed, and the government does not have the ability to control all regions within its borders. The Houthi insurgency, secessionists in the south, and the failing economy are three major challenges that the Yemeni government currently faces that seem to be taking priority over the reemergence of AQAP in Yemen. The Yemeni government sees the challenges as problems that threaten the existence of the

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<sup>167</sup> Boucek, “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” 10.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, “It’s all About Schools,” *NY Times*, 10 February 2010.

government and have, therefore, focused their resources on combating them, which has left an opening for AQAP to operate more freely and build the foundation to conduct attacks in Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, and throughout the world.

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## V. WHY YEMEN?

The dilemmas facing Yemen explored in the previous chapter are certainly a challenge to the government's ability to counter the threat of AQAP in the country, but they alone do not account for the rise of AQAP inside of Yemen. Yemen's weak state characteristics, along with the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia, and the lack of Yemeni political will to combat the threat of AQAP and their global jihadist agenda in Yemen have made the state an ideal location for the regional organization. The fact that AQAP has been successful in gaining a foothold in the ungoverned areas of Yemen is cause for concern for the United States and other western countries who face a global terrorist threat. Yemen is not on the verge of becoming a failed state, like Somalia, but the challenges the government faces demonstrate that things could get a lot worse before they get better unless efforts are made to improve the security and economic conditions.<sup>169</sup> If economic and security conditions do worsen for Yemen, the state will become an excellent location for a reincarnation of the al-Qaeda leadership that is being pushed out of Pakistan and Afghanistan today. The underlying issues that allow AQAP's message to resonate with the people need to be addressed or the terrorism threat in Yemen is likely to grow in the future.

This chapter will address three major reasons why AQAP has come to the forefront of al-Qaeda in the Persian Gulf. At the heart of the problem is the fact that Yemen is a weak state and is unable to provide many basic social services to its populace, while at the same time, is either unwilling or unable to control the whole extent of its territory. The importance of Yemen in the fight against global terrorism cannot be underestimated as "Yemen has contributed fighters to all three generations of the global jihad," and could soon become the next staging point for all major operations against the West.<sup>170</sup> The United States cannot and should not try to solve this problem alone. The problem of terrorism in Yemen is an international threat that needs to be addressed by the

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<sup>169</sup> Butters, "The Next Afghanistan?" 32.

<sup>170</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez, "Radicalization in the Persian Gulf: assessing the potential of Islamist militancy in Saudi Arabia and Yemen," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2008), 6.

leading powers in the world and, most importantly, by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. By studying the conditions that make Yemen a weak state, we can determine how to strengthen the state so that it can provide basic services to the majority of its people and eliminate the conditions that allow AQAP to recruit, train, and operate within Yemen.

## **A. PROBLEMS WITH WEAK STATES**

Today, the United States is the world's sole remaining superpower, and we no longer fear the threat from militaries of other world powers, but "rather transnational threats emanating from the world's most poorly governed countries."<sup>171</sup> Tremendous attention has been given to weak and failing states in recent years because of their role in transnational terrorism. Weak and failing states, like Sudan and Afghanistan, have both harbored Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda leadership in the last two decades. From these locations, al-Qaeda has been able to conduct terrorist operations that have killed thousands of innocent people from the Middle East to Africa to the United States. Prior to 11 September 2001, policymakers viewed failing states strictly through a humanitarian lens, but this has changed and the leadership has been convinced that America is now more threatened by failing states than it is by conquering ones.<sup>172</sup> Lately, weak and failing states have caused more worry and "anxiety about the spread of violent Islamic extremism and staging of terrorist attacks from ungoverned areas of such states has entered U.S. strategic thinking."<sup>173</sup> For the United States to combat the threat of weak and failing states such as Yemen, it must first understand the characteristics of weak states and why they are unable to provide the proper authority to thwart the threat of transnational terrorism.

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<sup>171</sup> Stewart Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Fact of Fiction?" *The Washington Quarterly* 29:2 (Spring 2006): 27.

<sup>172</sup> Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Fact of Fiction?" 27.

<sup>173</sup> Marla C. Haims et al. "Breaking the Failed-State Cycle," *RAND Corporation*, Occasion Paper (2008): 2.

Though attention to weak and failing states has increased, there is no universal definition or agreement on the number of these states in the world today. Failed states are commonly defined as those with the inability to achieve the characteristics described by Max Weber in his definition of a state. Failed states cannot “project or assert authority within their own borders, making them particularly susceptible to internal violence. They are often characterized by deteriorating living standards, corruption, a marked lack of civil society, and fewer services.”<sup>174</sup> Terrorist groups are able to flourish in states that fall in this category because the state cannot or will not challenge the terrorist group. It can also be argued that weak states can pose just as much danger as failed states, as they have many of the same deficiencies. In most instances of weak and failing states, the state just does not have the capabilities to assert effective control over the entirety of its territory and this provides an ungoverned space where terrorist organizations can recruit, train, and conduct operations successfully.

There is no consensus on how many weak and failing states there are in the world today. The Commission on Weak States and U.S. National Security estimates that there are between 50 and 60; the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development classifies 46 nations as “fragile,” and the World Bank treats 30 countries in its Low-Income Under Stress program.<sup>175</sup> The discrepancy in estimates shows the differences each have in defining weak and failing states, but what can be agreed upon is the fact that these states are major cause for concern because they can create a host of problems for the rest of the world. Weak and failing states create pockets that are susceptible to terrorism, WMD proliferation, crime, disease, energy insecurity, and regional instability.<sup>176</sup> Each of these problems is not solely the problem of the individual state, but also threatens the security of the rest of the world. Weak and failing states provide bases for transnational criminal enterprises involved in the production, transit, or trafficking of drugs, weapons, and guns. They serve as important breeding grounds for new diseases and, because they lack the capacity to respond to the pandemic, endanger

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<sup>174</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda’s Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror*, 26.

<sup>175</sup> Patrick, “Weak States and Global Threats: Fact of Fiction?” 29.

<sup>176</sup> Patrick, “Weak States and Global Threats: Fact of Fiction?” 33.

the rest of the world. Weak and failing states endanger energy security because reliance on these states increases the risk of interruption of supplies. These weak states also threaten the stability of the entire region as their conflicts can often spill into neighboring countries or induce external intervention.<sup>177</sup> Although there is a range of problems that weak and failing states can cause for the rest of the world, none may be greater to the West than the threat of transnational terrorism.

There may not be a better example of a weak state today than Yemen. The Yemeni government faces a myriad of challenges that consume a tremendous amount of their resources, which prevent them from being able to effectively govern the whole of their territory. A nation-state exists to deliver political goods including, security, education, health services, economic opportunity, and environmental surveillance to its citizens.<sup>178</sup> As discussed in Chapter IV, the Yemeni government is unable to provide many of the political goods that a state is supposed to provide for its people. The Yemeni economy is failing, unemployment rates are very high, the state is running out of water, there are not enough publicly run schools to support the population, malnutrition numbers are staggering, and the state is in the middle of fighting two separate conflicts against the Houthis in the north and secessionists in the south. This inability of the Yemeni government to govern effectively has produced a sense of illegitimacy that AQAP is using to help garner support in the country. Organizations such as AQAP

Are eager to step in and fill a void when the government is unable to provide its citizens with essential services. When such groups provide health, education, and protection services instead of or better than the government, they gain legitimacy, respect, and authority in the eyes of the public.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Fact of Fiction?" 38–44.

<sup>178</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure," *The Washington Quarterly* 25: 3 (Summer 2002): 87.

<sup>179</sup> Haims et al, "Breaking the Failed-State Cycle," 24.

Groups such as Hizbullah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza, have been successful in providing these essential services in the past and it has helped lead to their popularity in other areas. AQAP may not be as popular in Yemen as Hizbullah and Hamas are in their respective countries, but they are building strong relationships with the powerful Yemeni tribes who control large amounts of territory within Yemen.

Whereas it can be argued that violence is one of the outcomes of an organization in response “to an attempt to crush Islamic activism through broad repressive measures that leave few alternatives,” this study maintains that Yemen’s inability to provide proper goods and services allowed an already violent organization, AQAP, to recruit amongst a disgruntled population.<sup>180</sup> The Yemeni state is going to continue to weaken as the economy worsens and what resources it has continue to go to combating the Houthis and southern secessionists. Its ability to govern the whole of the territory will continue to dwindle and AQAP is going to be there in the future, exploiting the weakness by operating freely in the ungoverned spaces, and recruiting the disenchanting population. The government cannot provide security throughout the country and cannot provide the proper social services that should be provided by an effective government. Yemen can be seen as the poster child for problems with weak and failing states. Although not a failed state, Yemen is a weak state, and the al-Qaeda organization has recognized the weakness, and will continue to utilize the safe haven provided to them as long as they are able to. Yemen’s weakness will continue to allow AQAP to operate, and if the al-Qaeda leadership on the Pakistan-Afghanistan borders is forced to flee, Yemen becomes the most logical stopping point for the next era of the transnational terrorist network.

## **B. SUCCESS IN SAUDI ARABIA**

Saudi Arabia has mounted a successful campaign against the al-Qaeda organization over the last decade. The study of their success is important to Yemen for two major reasons. First, the success of Saudi Arabia against the al-Qaeda affiliate operating within their state pushed Yemen to the forefront for their organization in the

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<sup>180</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement,” in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 62.

region. Second, the success of the Saudi government serves as an example of how the terrorist threat may be countered in Yemen. Thomas Heghammer argues in his article, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” that despite the widespread view of Saudi Arabia as al-Qaeda country, jihad in Saudi Arabia has for the most part failed.<sup>181</sup> By studying the failure of al-Qaeda or success of Saudi Arabia, we can gather insight to why the organization has reappeared in Yemen and what the Yemeni government and other western nations can do to exterminate the global threat in Yemen.

Osama bin Laden announced the Saudi jihad in 1996 after the continued presence of U.S. troops deployed to Saudi Arabia during the 1990–1991 Gulf Crisis. Bin Laden considered the presence totally unacceptable and saw the foreign military presence as the occupation of a Muslim land. The United States presence undermined the legitimacy of the Saudi state, and caused bin Laden to see the state as an agent of the United States. Bin Laden believed that if the Americans were evicted from Saudi Arabia first, the regime would certainly fall soon afterward. He set out to recruit jihadists in Saudi Arabia and Yemen to conduct operations in the Kingdom, but suspended operations after a severe crackdown by the Saudi state in 1998. After the United State’s invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, bin Laden decided to halt the suspension of operations in the Kingdom after the loss of its safe haven in Afghanistan. During 2002, Saudi al-Qaeda members returned home and formed the first resemblance of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and began a military campaign in Saudi Arabia.<sup>182</sup>

From 2003 to 2006, AQAP in Saudi Arabia conducted a series of attacks and battled Saudi security forces in an attempt to mount a campaign against Westerners in the Kingdom. The attacks started with the East Riyadh operation in May of 2003 against Western expatriates, but soon turned against the Saudi security forces after heavy security crackdowns against the organization. The Saudi crackdown targeted the organization’s top leaders and many were either killed or arrested following the first operation. They continued to conduct operations over the next two years against Western targets, but

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<sup>181</sup> Thomas Heghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, Occasional Paper Series (25 February 2010): 4.

<sup>182</sup> Heghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” 11–13.

AQAP in Saudi Arabia experienced several setbacks during its campaign, because in several of their attacks, the majority of the casualties were Arabs and Muslims. Before these operations, AQAP had mild support amongst the population, but the attacks on their own people turned the public opinion against the militants.<sup>183</sup> After Saudi security forces raided a farm housing the most senior militants of the organization in April 2005, AQAP operations slowly died out and, by 2006, the campaign had failed.<sup>184</sup>

The failure of the AQAP campaign in Saudi Arabia from 2003 to 2006 can be explained by three reasons. The first was the success of security forces; the second was a new rehabilitation and counter-radicalization program; and the third was the lack of popular support for AQAP. The security forces in Saudi Arabia were given tremendous resources to conduct counterterrorism as “the total security budget in 2004, 2005, and 2006 was estimated at \$8.5, \$10 and \$12 billion respectively.”<sup>185</sup> The Interior Ministry built state-of-the-art training centers and the security forces received considerable assistance from the United Kingdom and the United States. The better-trained security forces appeared more merciful and forgiving towards militants as they did not torture AQAP militants like they did in the mid-1990s. The state also cracked down on the illegal arms market, boosted border control, and offered amnesties in 2004 and 2006 to those who surrendered during the campaign. The Saudi government improved the strength of the security forces, while at the same time, appearing to be fair in order to stem recruitment and prevent further radicalization of detainees.<sup>186</sup>

The second reason for the failure of the jihad in Saudi Arabia was the institution of rehabilitation and counter-radicalization programs. The Saudi Arabian government viewed the struggle against violent extremism as a “war of ideas,” and “stems from a recognition that a violent radical Islamist extremism cannot be defeated by traditional

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<sup>183</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “Among Saudis, Attack Has Soured Qaeda Supporters,” *NY Times*, 11 November 2003.

<sup>184</sup> Heghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” 17–18.

<sup>185</sup> Heghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” 19.

<sup>186</sup> Heghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” 19–20.

security means alone.”<sup>187</sup> They outlined their plan to thwart extremism and radicalization through their PRAC strategy, which stands for Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare. The prevention component of the Saudi strategy targeted not the extremists themselves, but the large population who sympathize with extremists and do not condemn extremist beliefs. The government supports a series of summer activities to compete with the questionable summer camps and religious retreats that attempt to expose young men to extremist ideologies. The Ministry of Education provides lectures and programs throughout the states’ schools to warn young students of the negative effects that extremist terrorism and violence cause. The Saudi state has also instituted a large-scale public information campaign to emphasize the damage that terrorism has caused to gain public support against extremist beliefs.<sup>188</sup>

The second component of the PRAC strategy is rehabilitation, and a focus on “a comprehensive effort to rehabilitate and reeducate violent extremists and extremist sympathizers through intensive religious debates and psychological counseling.”<sup>189</sup> The objective of the rehab program is to get the terrorists to renounce their ideologies through intense religious debate with very credible religious figures. It is based on the fact that the suspects were misled by extremists about their faith and that through a proper understanding of their religion, the suspects would abandon their extremist beliefs. The final component of the PRAC strategy is aftercare. The aftercare programs provide a halfway house for detainees to ease their way back into society, programs to reintegrate former Guantanamo Bay detainees, and policies to prevent released detainees from committing new crimes. Once an individual has renounced his beliefs, served his time in a care rehabilitation center, and is released, assistance is provided by the state in locating a job and other benefits such as government stipends, a car, and an apartment. They are also encouraged to settle down, marry, and start a family. The PRAC program has shown

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<sup>187</sup> Christopher Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s ‘Soft’ Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Carnegie Paper No. 97 (September 2008): 4.

<sup>188</sup> Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s ‘Soft’ Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” 8–10.

<sup>189</sup> Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s ‘Soft’ Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” 11.



good results, claiming a success rate of 80 to 90 percent. Out of the roughly fourteen hundred individuals who have been released, the Saudi state claims only thirty-five have been rearrested for security offenses.<sup>190</sup> The rehabilitation and counter-radicalization programs have been very successful in spoiling the success of extremism in Saudi Arabia since the start of al-Qaeda's most recent campaign in 2003.

A third reason for the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia was the lack of support of the populace for the extremists. The Saudi government did an excellent job of using the media to "magnify the effect of violence on Muslim life and property, thereby undermining the militants' message that their jihad focused on Westerners."<sup>191</sup> With each attack by the AQAP in Saudi Arabia that killed innocent Muslims, the populace turned more and more against the extremists. The Saudi state used its media to capitalize on the attacks by portraying the militants as terrorists, not those who were participating in a lawful jihad. AQAP in Saudi Arabia were also unable to obtain any scholarly credibility, which is very serious in the Kingdom, because their mainstream credible figures were imprisoned early in the campaign and the ideologues who took their place had much less respect and influence in the Islamist community. Because the Iraq war was ongoing during this time, many Saudis also felt that if extremists really wanted to combat the Crusaders, they should move their fight to Iraq.<sup>192</sup> The violence of the organization on the Saudi population and the ability of the Saudi state to control the media to emphasize the terrorist tendencies of the early AQAP, severely hindered its ability to recruit and maintain sympathizers and generally created little support among the Saudi population.

The importance of the failure of the former AQAP in Saudi Arabia is important to understanding the rise of AQAP in Yemen. The failure of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia is one of the main reasons why Yemen moved to the forefront for the regional organization. The strength of the Saudi security forces and the ability of the government to isolate the

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<sup>190</sup> Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," 11–21.

<sup>191</sup> Heghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," 21.

<sup>192</sup> Heghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," 22–23.

organization limited Saudi Arabia as a location to operate from. What Yemen offered to the al-Qaeda leadership was the exact opposite. Yemen's weak state characteristics, sympathetic population, and lack of political will to eliminate its threat, served as a perfect site to reorganize the group. Although there is little continuity between any of the personnel between the Yemeni AQAP of 2009 and its Saudi predecessor, the organization was able to make a rebirth in Yemen under more ideal conditions.<sup>193</sup> It seems that the Yemeni AQAP has learned from some of the mistakes the Saudi AQAP made, and has stayed away from attacking the local population and has worked hard to garner support among the tribes. The support of the tribes in many areas of Yemen offers AQAP the areas to recruit and operate, something they were never fully able to accomplish in Saudi Arabia. The Yemeni AQAP has many of the same goals as its former Saudi organization, but now has better conditions to act on them. They have still attempted to attack Saudi Arabia, as the attack on Deputy Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef showcased, but they have focused their rage against Western entities.<sup>194</sup> The reemergence of AQAP in Yemen shows that the fight against the Western Crusaders and apostate regimes has continued, but if the Yemeni regime, with the support of the GCC and western countries, is successful in eliminating the threat of AQAP in Yemen, al-Qaeda may have very few options on where to take the organization next.

A second major learning point from the failure of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia is that the study offers an example of how to combat the organization. The Saudi example showed,

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<sup>193</sup> Heghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," 26.

<sup>194</sup> Scott Stewart, "AQAP: Paradigm Shifts and Lessons Learned," *STRATFOR Global Intelligence*, 02 September 2009.  
[http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090902\\_aqap\\_paradigm\\_shifts\\_and\\_lessons\\_learned?ip\\_auth\\_redirect=1](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090902_aqap_paradigm_shifts_and_lessons_learned?ip_auth_redirect=1).

To eradicate support for extremism is not one to be waged solely as a security contest but as one that will require a concerted effort by the entire state apparatus, from schools and mosques, to local and provincial administrations, and the mass media, and social service providers and organizations.<sup>195</sup>

The conditions in Yemen may not be identical to those in Saudi Arabia, but the example of success can be used to build toward creating stronger institutions in Yemen to combat the recruiting ability and sympathy of AQAP by the local populace. Saudi Arabia provides a great model of what Yemen's counterterrorism program should strive to become if the government really wants to eradicate the extremist organization from its country. It also offers Western countries a model as to what support needs to be given to Yemen if they want to help Yemen with its fight to prevent AQAP from having the areas and support to conduct operations against Western interests. The GCC should also be heavily involved in helping Yemen build a stronger counterterrorism program because it is in the GCCs interest to do so. Further weakening in Yemen can leak to other areas of the Gulf and cause instability in the region that could affect every member of the GCC. Yemen's problems should not be seen as just its own. The success of the Saudi state, in combating the threat of al-Qaeda, forced the regional al-Qaeda organization to relocate to Yemen, but at the same time, it offered the rest of the world a great illustration on how the threat of extremist organizations can be impeded in the Middle East.

### **C. LACK OF POLITICAL WILL**

The lack of political will by the Yemeni government has been another major reason why AQAP has been able to prosper in Yemen in recent years. Though they lack the ability to combat the threat of AQAP in many areas, they also seem to lack the political will to combat the organization. The effort they make to combat the threat of AQAP in the country seems to be just enough to appease the United States in order to prevent Yemen from becoming the next location for the global war on terror. Yemen does not see the AQAP as a threat to the state's existence as it does the Houthi Rebellion and southern secessionists and, therefore, is not as committed to eliminating the terrorist

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<sup>195</sup> Heghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," 6.

organization. The Yemeni government also has a history of accommodating global jihadists in the country as well as releasing former jihadists on the condition that they “pledged to respect the rights of non-Muslim foreigners living in Yemen or visiting it.”<sup>196</sup> The Yemeni government may be seen as making an effort to combat the danger of AQAP in Yemen, but a change in mindset of the threat of AQAP is going to need to be made by the Yemeni government if the AQAP is going to be impeded in the country.

Though AQAP claims they would like to overthrow the illegitimate government under President Saleh, they have done little in the form of attacks against the state. The majority of the major attacks conducted by AQAP in Yemen have been against Western targets, not the national government, though clashes between the two have led to Yemeni troops being killed and injured.<sup>197</sup> As long as AQAP is going to focus its attacks on Western targets, the Yemeni government is going to continue to keep the Houthi Rebellion and the southern secessionists at a higher priority. Currently, the only threat AQAP exhibits to the Yemeni government would be if it caused a foreign intervention in Yemen due to its actions, an event that seems very unlikely in the near future.

The Yemeni government may even see the threat of AQAP on Western countries as being to its advantage. As long as there is a threat, it is going to continue to receive money from Western donors and the Yemeni government is taking advantage of the situation. Most recently, the United States pledged \$150 million in security assistance for Yemen, up from \$67 million the year before.<sup>198</sup> When al-Qaeda was eliminated in Yemen in 2003, the United States turned its focus away from security in the country and eventually removed all foreign aid because the Yemeni government did not meet the democratic prerequisites set before them. The Yemeni government is benefiting from the threat of AQAP in its country and is doing just enough to appear as an ally to the United States in the fight against the global jihadist threat. The Yemeni government may be

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<sup>196</sup> Hassan al-Zaidi, “Prospects of Releasing 70 Terror-Linked Detainees,” *Yemen Times*, 22 September 2003.

<sup>197</sup> Hafez, “Radicalization in the Persian Gulf: assessing the potential of Islamist militancy in Saudi Arabia and Yemen,” 2.

<sup>198</sup> Ian Black and Hugh Macleod, “YouTube Islamist: How Anwar Al-Awlaki Became al-Qaida’s Link to Local Terror,” *The Guardian* (UK), 08 May 2010, 13.

assuming that if it wants to continue to receive money from the international community, there must be an international threat, and therefore is going to prolong the fight against AQAP as long as it is beneficial.

The Yemeni government may also lack the political will to combat the threat of AQAP in the country because it is in a precarious position in its relationship with the United States. It cannot appear to be too close to the United States, for fear it will be charged with being collaborators to the enemy. President Saleh “paid a high price domestically for allowing the United States to carry out an attack in Yemen,” when they allowed the November 2002 strike on al-Qaeda’s head in Yemen, al-Harithi.<sup>199</sup> This may be the reason it has refused to go after radical U.S.-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki after he was added to the CIA’s list of targets to be killed or captured.<sup>200</sup> The Yemeni government has to walk a fine line between cooperating with the United States and not appearing too close to the United States, as its own citizens are weary of any intentions the United States has in their country. If the Yemeni government was seen as a full-fledged partner with the United States, AQAP could use that to help its message resonate with the population. The Yemeni government must also be careful to not harm innocent civilians during its attacks to combat AQAP because any civilian death supports AQAP’s claims that the government is not treating the Yemeni people appropriately. The Yemeni government may, therefore, be conducting just enough attacks to appease the United States and this allows AQAP to continue to conduct operations against Western entities inside and outside the country.

Yemen’s lack of political will to eliminate the threat of AQAP in the country can also been seen in its attempted rehabilitation program and its decisions to negotiate with suspected terrorists. In September 2002, the Yemeni government established the Committee for Religious Dialogue to “interact with security detainees on suspicion of involvement with Islamist extremists and terrorists.”<sup>201</sup> The program sought to create

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<sup>199</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “Al-Qa’ida in Yemen’s 2008 Campaign,” 2.

<sup>200</sup> Dale Gavlak, “Yemen Declines to Pursue Cleric Targeted By U.S.,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 April 2010.

<sup>201</sup> Johnsen and Boucek, “The Dilemma of the Yemeni Detainees at Guantanamo Bay,” 2.

religious discussions and debates about terrorism based on religion, get the participants to recognize the authority of the state, and obtain assurances that they would not participate in violence within the country. There were clearly many flaws in the program and it was eventually suspended. The program plainly stated that those who renounced violence would be eligible for release through an amnesty program, which basically created a revolving door policy. The Yemeni government also provided little external social support, support that has been very successful in Saudi Arabia. Passports were not confiscated and the Yemeni government did not maintain close tabs on the former prisoners. The breakdown of the program may be seen in its failure to provide external support and because the committee was less concerned with actually changing the ideological beliefs of the participants than it was with obtaining their acquiescence on sensitive political matters. Many of the 364 released have reportedly been killed in Iraq.<sup>202</sup>

The rehabilitation program indicates that the Yemeni government is willing to go through the motions, but is unwilling to put any substance behind its policies. It seems it is willing to negotiate with the terrorists and in exchange for the “promise” not to conduct further attacks, prisoners will be released. One such example of this is the case of Jamal al-Badawi, one of the masterminds of the USS Cole attack. Within weeks of his capture in 2007, it was reported that he was granted freedom in exchange for his assurance that he would not commit violent activities within the borders of the state.<sup>203</sup> The Yemeni government only cares whether the terrorist agrees not to commit violence within the state, and what he does outside the borders of Yemen seems to be of no relevance. The actions by the Yemeni government in their treatment of global jihadists makes it a very suspect security partner and shows that they may lack the political will to combat the threat of terrorists inside their country, unless the government truly feels threatened that the organization could topple the regime.

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<sup>202</sup> Johnsen and Boucek, “The Dilemma of the Yemeni Detainees at Guantanamo Bay,” 2.

<sup>203</sup> Johnsen, “Securing Yemen’s Cooperation in the Second Phase of the War on al-Qa’ida,” 14–15.

The lack of political will to combat the terrorist threat exhibited by AQAP in Yemen may have much to do with the treatment of Islamic fighters after the Soviet War in Afghanistan.

Several thousand ‘Arab Afghan’ volunteers, who fought alongside the *mujahidin* (Islamic fighters), returned to Yemen and were subsequently embraced by the government and treated as heroes by many Yemenis. Some veterans of the Afghan war were integrated into the military and security forces.<sup>204</sup>

Former Afghan volunteers were also incorporated into the Yemeni government and many who occupy positions in the regime are “sympathetic to anti-US militants and Yemeni fighters abroad.”<sup>205</sup> These leaders oppose cooperation with the United States on the war against terror and showed that they do not oppose Yemenis fighting against the United States when a court acquitted a number of defendants who admitted to fighting in Iraq because they declared it was legal under Yemeni law.<sup>206</sup> Men like Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, who was a former associate of Osama bin Laden, hold important places in Yemeni society. He helped found one of the major political parties in Yemen, the *Islah* party, and is in charge of al-Iman University, whose students have been connected to a number of violent activities. The United States has accused al-Zindani of using the university as a recruiting ground for al-Qaeda and the Yemeni government has refused to turn him over to U.S. authorities. People sympathetic to the cause of AQAP are imbedded in the Yemeni government and are partially responsible for the reasons the Yemeni government has not fully gone after eliminating AQAP in Yemen.

AQAP has been able to grow inside Yemen to the point of being able to conduct international attacks against the United States, as the failed Christmas Day bombing illustrates. Yemen’s weak state characteristics, along with the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia and the lack of Yemeni political will to combat the threat of AQAP and their global jihadist agenda in Yemen, have made the state an ideal location for the regional

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<sup>204</sup> Sharp, “Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations,” 8.

<sup>205</sup> Hafez, “Radicalization in the Persian Gulf: assessing the potential of Islamist militancy in Saudi Arabia and Yemen,” 7.

<sup>206</sup> Barfi, “Yemen on the Brink?” 14.

organization. These three reasons, along with the challenges that the Yemeni government faces, have brought Yemen to the forefront of the al-Qaeda organization. To combat the threat of AQAP in Yemen, and their ability to conduct operations against Western targets inside Yemen, as well as internationally, these topics need to be addressed. The previous chapters have explained the history of al-Qaeda inside Yemen, the rise of the AQAP, and the reasons AQAP has been able to flourish in the country over the last several years. After studying how AQAP has been able to thrive, we can now look to counter those elements that allow the organization to thrive. By eliminating the factors that allow AQAP to recruit, train, and resonate with the population, the Yemeni government, along with its international partners, may be able to counter AQAP and remove Yemen as an ideal location for the global jihadist organization.



## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has tried to develop a thorough explanation for the recent rise of the al-Qaeda affiliate, AQAP, in Yemen. The study has focused on the fact that Yemen is a weak state in dire straits and its failure to provide proper social services to its entire population and its inability to control the whole of its territory has allowed AQAP to rebuild an organization that was nearly decimated by the end of 2003. The challenges facing Yemen are not unique to the region as many countries in the Middle East are facing similar economic, demographic, and security challenges. There are also dozens of weak states throughout the world, “however, in Yemen these challenges threaten to disrupt not just local stability, but also regional and international stability...If left unaddressed, Yemen’s problems could potentially destabilize Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States.”<sup>207</sup> Yemen’s history of supporting global jihadists during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, AQAP’s ability to generate a message that resonates with a portion of the Yemeni population, and Yemen’s weak state characteristics should be cause for action by Western countries who are attempting to combat the threat of global terrorism. Recent reports have warned that dozens of “veterans of al-Qaeda’s operations in Afghanistan have been pouring into Yemen,” and unless a substantial effort is made to combat the threat of al-Qaeda, Yemen may become the next headquarters for the organization.<sup>208</sup> Western countries should be placing Yemen near the front of their priorities for the war against global extremists, behind only Afghanistan and Pakistan. If the threat of AQAP in Yemen is not met, it may lead to disastrous security repercussions for countries in the Gulf as well as the United States.

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<sup>207</sup> Boucek, “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” 24.

<sup>208</sup> Richard Spencer, “Al Qaeda’s Afghan Veterans Are Pouring Into Yemen, Says Leading Official,” *London Daily Telegraph*, 11 January 2010, 15.

Since the attempted Christmas Day bombing, the United States has promised to increase total aid to Yemen by significant amounts. The United States plans to increase development and security assistance aid to Yemen \$10 million to \$63 million in 2010.<sup>209</sup> This does not include \$150 million in military assistance to Yemen approved by Defense Secretary Robert Gates on 19 February of this year. This amount doubled the previous year's military assistance to the country.<sup>210</sup> The Pentagon has also assigned "more special forces personnel to Yemen as part of a broad push to speed the training of the country's counterterror forces in the wake of the failed Christmas Day attack."<sup>211</sup> The aid proposed to Yemen in the coming year is a start to helping Yemen combat the threat of AQAP in Yemen, but it is not nearly the complete solution. The United States cannot help strengthen Yemen by itself, and the United States, along with the international community, must strike at the underlying issues that have allowed AQAP to reemerge in Yemen once again.

In late January 2010, the United Kingdom held a conference in London to discuss the threat posed by Yemen and the al-Qaeda affiliate that operates from the country. More than two dozen governments and international financial institutions, including foreign ministers from Yemen's Persian Gulf neighbors, as well as the U.S., Russia, China and leading NATO members, met and discussed what needs to be done to combat the transnational terrorist threat in Yemen. During the conference, Yemen asked the international community to provide \$4 billion annually.<sup>212</sup> Currently, Yemen receives on average of \$13 to \$15 per capita in total foreign aid money, less than what many countries in sub-Saharan Africa receive. Yemen officials believe that their country receives inadequate international aid attention considering their strategic importance and

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<sup>209</sup> Jonathan S. Landay, "Obama Aid To Yemen Could Risk Backlash in Arab World," *Miami Herald*, 17 January 2010.

<sup>210</sup> Lolita C. Baldor, "US OKs \$150 million to help Yemen fight terrorism," *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2010.

<sup>211</sup> Yochi Dreazen, "Pentagon To Send More Special Forces Troops to Yemen," *Wall Street Journal*, 27 January 2010.

<sup>212</sup> Karen Deyoung, "Yemen's Efforts Vs. Al-Qaeda Praised," *Washington Post*, 28 January 2010, 11.

the risks of regional stability and security with the problems facing their country. The United Kingdom is the single largest foreign donor in Yemen as it has committed \$83 million per year for the next five years.<sup>213</sup>

In 2006, the GCC pledged \$3.7 billion dollars to Yemen, though only 15 percent of its commitments were honored.<sup>214</sup> At the London conference, the GCC pledged to make good on the pledge from four years ago. The biggest total donor out of the GCC is Saudi Arabia as they provide investments, grants, and nearly annual direct budgetary support.<sup>215</sup> It is important that the promises made at conferences like the one held in London are followed through. The United Kingdom is leading the donor community with the support of the United States, but these two countries cannot prop up Yemen by themselves. The GCC must and should play a huge role in supporting the Yemeni government in its efforts to strengthen. It is in its own best interest to do so because an unstable Yemen can have effects in every country throughout the Middle East. Saudi Arabia should especially be concerned about an unstable Yemen. The two countries share a long porous border and AQAP in Yemen today is a reincarnation of the AQAP found in Saudi Arabia just a few years ago. The money given to Yemen needs to be invested in the local communities to help support the government's ability to provide basic social services to its people. The following recommendations suggest what the United States can do to help strengthen Yemen, but this effort cannot and should not be done by the United States alone. The terrorist threat in Yemen is an international one, and to help combat it, the help of the international community is crucial.

For the United States, the most important step to combating the international threat of AQAP coming from Yemen is stabilizing the country. The United States, the United Kingdom, and the GCC countries must guarantee that they will not allow Yemen to weaken further and have the chance of becoming a failed state. This effort will force the United States to put even more money into the country, but the United States cannot

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<sup>213</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 21.

<sup>214</sup> "Yemen ask donors to follow through on aid," Al Arabiya News Channel (29 March 2010) <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/03/29/104381.html>.

<sup>215</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 21.

link all of its aid to the terrorist threat. If international donors, including the United States, continue to only focus on the threat of AQAP in Yemen, at the expense of the other major issues in the country, it only causes the Yemeni government to prolong the conflict to continue to receive financial assistance. Yemen must not feel that they would be forgotten or neglected in the absence of the global jihadist threat emanating from their country.<sup>216</sup> The United States has shown this type of shortsightedness before in Yemen, after the near collapse of al-Qaeda in the country in 2003, and because the United States neglected Yemen, AQAP was able to reemerge stronger than before and with more recruits. The U.S. focus in Yemen should consist of four major factors: continued targeting of AQAP leaders, creating stability in Yemen by helping end the two major internal conflicts in the country, address the underlying grievances of the population's lack of social services, and help institute a well-founded soft counterterrorism program based on the successful Saudi program. If the United States is able to help Yemen meet these four criteria, the ability of AQAP to recruit, train, and operate in the country, as well as the prospect of Yemen becoming the next headquarters for the al-Qaeda leadership, will be severely hindered.

#### **A. TARGET AQAP**

The United States must continue to assist Yemen in the targeting of AQAP leaders. AQAP will have tremendous difficulty in replacing experienced and competent operational leaders and the loss of major components of their leadership will strikingly blunt their effectiveness. The United States and Yemen were successful at this in 2002–2003, when they effectively eliminated al-Qaeda in Yemen by targeting the al-Harithri network. Their assistance should consist of sharing intelligence and preparing Yemeni forces to conduct strikes, but it is important for the United States to work through the Yemeni security forces and not appear as the guiding force behind the attacks. The United States needs to be a silent unseen partner in this endeavor as any “overt Western involvement in targeting AQAP’s leadership risks fueling the anti-Western sentiment amongst the tribes that would be far more likely to strengthen, rather than weaken, their

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<sup>216</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “The Expansion Strategy of Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula,” 10.

support for AQAP.”<sup>217</sup> The U.S.-assisted air strikes conducted in mid-December were seen by many Yemenis as an encroachment on their sovereignty. Any further overt Western intervention only helps AQAP’s message that the Yemeni government is an American lackey and undeserving to govern Yemen.<sup>218</sup>

Currently, U.S. special operation forces are training Yemeni security forces in order to build Yemen’s capacity to conduct counterterrorism operations and continued training should take place to improve the Yemeni forces’ ability to combat AQAP. By helping Yemeni security forces build their capability, the United States can eventually distance itself from operations and prevent a backlash from its involvement. To help combat the threat of AQAP, it is vital that Yemen, with the assistance of the United States, attempts to eliminate the leadership of AQAP, and once eliminated, work in other areas of counterterrorism to prevent it from rising again.

## **B. END CONFLICTS TO INCREASE STABILITY**

Yemen has spent a tremendous amount of their limited resources in fighting the Houthi Rebellion and southern secessionists. Not only have the two campaigns been costly, the Houthi Rebellion has also led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis. The United States must put pressure on the Yemeni government to end the two conflicts so that its focus can be turned to combating AQAP and improving its economy and social services. AQAP has been able to prosper on the instability of the Yemeni government, and the government’s inability to combat this threat, because its attention was focused elsewhere. Stabilizing the two major internal conflicts in Yemen is a necessary condition for the Yemeni government before it is going to be willing to put a major portion of its resources towards thwarting the threat of AQAP. Until the two conflicts that the Yemeni government sees as threatening the existence of its regime are eliminated, it is going to continue to maintain only a token fight against the transnational terrorist threat emanating from its country.

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<sup>217</sup> Phillips and Shanahan, “Al-Qa’ida, Tribes and Instability in Yemen,” 8.

<sup>218</sup> Phillips, “What Comes Next in Yemen?” 11.

The United States needs to persuade Middle Eastern countries like Qatar to act as a mediator between the Yemeni government and its two disgruntled entities. The Qatari government was nearly successful in the cease-fire agreements in 2007 and 2008 between the Yemeni government and the leaders of the Houthi rebellion. At the core of the agreement was Qatar's "pledge to finance reconstruction and launch major development projects in Saada, possibly to the tune of \$300 million to \$500 million."<sup>219</sup> Now is a perfect time for a lasting agreement to be established between the Yemeni government and the Houthis because they are currently in a cease-fire. A Qatari led conference should focus on integrating the Zaydis of the north into the Yemeni political system. Zaydis see themselves as being excluded by the Wahhabi entities in Yemen, and the state should respond with accommodation and inclusion. One key to peace could be creating a Houthi political party that could represent the Zaydi population and integrate it into the state structure.<sup>220</sup> Many of the Houthi grievances stem from the fact that they feel excluded, that there is regional underdevelopment, and perceived socioeconomic injustices. By integrating them into the state structure, the government can work to alleviate the grievances and create a community that does not feel threatened by the rest of the population. The United States should not play the role of mediator in the Houthi situation, but should urge the Yemeni government to produce a solution that can help meet the grievances of the Zaydi population. The Zaydi population has a storied history in Yemen, and dominated both the religious and political life of North Yemen for nearly a thousand years. Their inclusion into the government could help build a more united Yemen and stabilize the country so the government can focus on the global jihadist threat that is thriving there.

The United States must also help the Yemeni government end the southern secessionist movement. Once again, the movement is based on the fact that a percentage of the population feels the government neglects them both economically and politically. The solution to the southern secessionist movement should be political not military, and the United States must not support Saleh in an expanded military campaign against the

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<sup>219</sup> International Crisis Group, "Yemen: Defusing the Sa'dah Time Bomb," 22.

<sup>220</sup> International Crisis Group, "Yemen: Defusing the Sa'dah Time Bomb," 25–26.

south. Saleh should be pushed to address the movement's political grievances, negotiate with moderate southern leaders, address the problem of economic development, and rebuild national reconciliation.<sup>221</sup> The Qatari government, or another friendly Middle Eastern regime, should be brought in to mediate the reconciliation. The reconciliation should be politically inclusive and bring back the former southern business community and ruling class to help turn the southern economy around. The Yemeni government needs to do the same thing with the Southern Movement as the Houthi Rebellion, and that is to include them politically so they can have a voice in how their region of Yemen is governed. Both conflicts stem from each community feeling neglected because they believe they do not receive the same economic and political possibilities of the northern elite. By bringing the two agitated populations into the political arena, many of the grievances held by the factions may be solved, and the state can put more money into developing the economy and combating the threat of AQAP.

### **C. HELP ADDRESS YEMENI GRIEVANCES**

This thesis has studied the many grievances the Yemeni population has with its government due to its lack of ability to provide the population with the social services provided by most governments around the world. The majority of the grievances stem from the state's weakness and AQAP is able to exploit the weakness and successfully recruit, train, and conduct operations inside of Yemen. In order to help Yemen combat AQAP inside Yemen, the United States must target the Yemeni grievances by strengthening Yemen's state capacity to effectively govern its people. The United States must invest in the "legitimacy and capacity of the state and society. We cannot grant 'legitimacy,' but we can assist in the development of those elements of the state that provide services to the citizens, and the development of a society strong enough to be partners to its state."<sup>222</sup> Military strikes, alone, against al-Qaeda are not the answer. By strengthening Yemen and eliminating the grievances that push a percentage of the

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<sup>221</sup> Day, "The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement," 11.

<sup>222</sup> Barbara K. Bodine, "Yemen: Primer and Prescriptions," *Prism* 1 No. 3 (June 2010): 54.

population towards AQAP, the United States can help combat the threat of al-Qaeda in two ways: targeting the organization and eliminating the factors that allow them to successfully operate.

The first focus for helping strengthen the Yemeni state should be strengthening the Yemeni economy. The unemployment rate is conservatively estimated at 35 percent, and this serves as a huge recruiting tool for AQAP. The United States and the GCC must work with Yemen to develop a post-oil economy in areas that can present jobs to the local population. One idea could be a revitalization of the Aden Port. It was vital to the British Empire, and today, could be another Singapore. Investing money and developing the port could “provide employment and government revenue, and help integrate the south and the north as more equal partners.”<sup>223</sup> It is a major natural resource for the Yemeni government and should be taken advantage of. If the security situation is secured, Yemen could benefit from its rich cultural heritage through tourism as well. The introduction of agricultural diversification could help to wean the country off qat production and help produce enough food to feed the large portions of the country going hungry each day. GCC countries must also re-open their doors to Yemeni labor, as was the situation before the first Gulf War. The Yemeni economy has never recovered from the expulsion of nearly a million Yemenis from the Gulf and the correlating remittances lost. The Yemeni economy has the ability to rebound, but it is going to need the help of the United States and the GCC, especially Saudi Arabia. Putting average Yemenis back to work would help eliminate one of the key recruiting tools used by AQAP to exploit the weak Yemeni government. As the United States and Yemen become more successful at fighting the threat of AQAP inside of Yemen, it will create safe conditions for foreign direct investment, so the strengthening of the government and its ability to thwart AQAP will go hand in hand. Security is needed in Yemen to help the economy and a better economy will help the security situation.

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<sup>223</sup> Bodine, “Yemen: Primer and Prescriptions,” 56.



To help the Yemeni government gain legitimacy with its people, Washington is going to have to put even more money into Yemen than projected for 2010. The aid programs of the United States should work toward “bypassing the central government in favor of regional and local levels.”<sup>224</sup> The government’s ability to get the necessary aid to the Yemenis who need it is lacking, and developing a system to deliver foreign aid to a local implementing partner will benefit Yemen. The money must be dedicated to help provide the basic social services that a population expects. The education system in Yemen should be a major focus of the increased aid. Education is critical to the long-term development of the economy and the survival of the state. The Yemeni population needs more state-regulated schools, but more importantly, qualified teachers at the primary and secondary levels. A better education system will also help the economy as the population will gain the necessary skills to help induce foreign investment. The United States must help create programs to aid the education system in Yemen so that the radical Islamist teaching is kept away from the majority of the youth. By building a superior education system, the Yemeni government can mitigate the influence of AQAP and its ability to recruit the uneducated, disenfranchised youth.

Along with education, money from international donors must be put into the local level to provide health care, and the water crisis must also be addressed. Aid could be used to develop expensive desalinization projects, improve irrigation, and be put towards implementing a plan to regulate and govern appropriate and legal water usage. The United States must encourage help from the GCC in order to implement better Yemeni governance of social services for its people. If the population begins to receive the social services that they feel are owed to them, the grievances that AQAP exploits will continue to erode. Everything possible in Yemen must be done to prevent the population from depending on AQAP for basic necessities that the government cannot provide. As is the case with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, it will only lead to more support for AQAP and less legitimacy for the Yemeni government.

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<sup>224</sup> Barfi, “Yemen on the Brink?” 20.

The final aspect of strengthening the government to help combat the violence of AQAP is improving the flaws of the governance. Yemen has “20 years experience in reasonably free, fair, and contested elections, including the last presidential election, nationally based multiparties, universal suffrage, and a strong civil society, its democratic experience is fragile and flawed but real and, most importantly, indigenous.”<sup>225</sup> Yemen has a legitimate democratic structure, but much of the population does not see the government as legitimate because of rampant corruption. The United States is not going to be able to solve all of Yemen’s problems, but it can work with Yemen to create agencies to combat corruption inside the government. By getting aid to the local governments, the United States can bypass levels of the central government that will take time in halting the corruption. The flaws of the Yemeni government should be a focus of the assistance, not a reason to disengage or not engage the Yemeni state. Yemen has a robust civil society estimated at 7,000 local NGOs and a number of international NGOs headed by Yemenis, and at the local level, these organizations can help implement the aid provided by donors.

AQAP’s strength in gaining a foothold in Yemeni society has been in its ability to build strong relationships with the Yemeni tribes, who have a strong presence in many parts of Yemen. Unlike in Iraq, where al-Qaeda intimidated the tribes, in Yemen AQAP has been able to foster a relationship with the tribes by focusing on the grievances that the tribes have with the government. They have also married into the tribes and are becoming part of the tribal community. In Yemen, AQAP’s attacks have focused on Western entities and it has not isolated the tribes or turned the population against it through the killing of innocent Muslims, like they did in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. AQAP has learned from the mistakes made by al-Qaeda organizations elsewhere, and have been careful to maintain strong ties to the tribal elements in Yemen. The strength of the tribal alliance could also be the biggest weakness of AQAP if the Yemeni government was able to isolate the tribes from AQAP. Currently, it is the tribes that are providing security in their areas for AQAP elements to recruit, train, and operate. Undermining the relationship between al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Iraqi tribes was vital to the undermining of

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<sup>225</sup> Bodine, “Yemen: Primer and Prescriptions,” 46.

the network in the country. By eliminating the grievances many of the tribes have with the government, including lack of social services and very little say in the political process, the Yemeni government can isolate AQAP. The loyalty between AQAP and the Yemeni tribes is thin, and if the Yemeni government was willing to make a better offer to the tribes than they are getting from AQAP, it is more than likely that the alliance between the tribal elements in Yemen and AQAP could fracture.

By slowing cronyism and bringing more Yemenis into the political environment, the Yemeni government can turn around many of the feelings of disenfranchisement by a majority of the population. It is important that the Yemeni government is urged to bring leaders of the Houthi Rebellion and Southern Movement into the government so they can have a say in the governing of their territories. These conflicts threaten to tear the Yemeni state apart, and much of the grievances have to do with the fact they feel neglected by the government. By giving them a say and ironing out differences, unity can be saved and the Yemeni government can turn its focus to other major issues that threaten the stability of the region, like the global jihadist agenda of AQAP. The Yemeni government is not going to turn into a strong and stable government over night, but if the United States and regional and international powers are willing to work with Yemen for the long term, Yemen has the potential and can turn its situation around. The United States cannot force its agenda on the Yemeni government, but must support the institutions, structures, and processes that most Yemenis take pride in.<sup>226</sup> Yemen can be strengthened, but it is going to take the help of the important Western donor countries, and most importantly, its neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

#### **D. SOFT COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY**

The fourth major factor of U.S. focus in Yemen should be the institution of a soft counterterrorism strategy based on Saudi Arabia's successful program. The Saudi program was successful because they understood that violent Islamist extremism cannot be defeated by traditional security means alone. The Saudis knew they needed to defeat the ideological infrastructure that supports political violence and were willing to invest

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<sup>226</sup> Bodine, "Yemen: Primer and Prescriptions," 53.

the resources necessary.<sup>227</sup> The United States needs to encourage Saudi Arabia to financially and structurally help Yemen create a successful soft counterterrorism campaign based on the PRAC strategy, because it is in Saudi Arabia's best interest to do so. The previous Yemeni rehabilitation campaign lacked the necessary prevention and aftercare for the program to be successful. Yemen's history of supporting global jihadism is working against it, but Yemen must work to reeducate the public about the dangers of extremism and radical Islam, and the negative effect it is having on the country. It must be made clear that the security situation is preventing foreign investment from entering the country, which is hurting the economy. The resources necessary for a proper aftercare program are vast, but necessary, if the program is going to be effective. If the government is able to portray, like Saudi Arabia was, that they are trying to help those who have been "tricked" by radical Islamists, the population may start trusting the government a little more. The Yemeni security services need to eliminate torturing suspects, something that has only worked to turn more moderates radical, and focus on rehabilitating Yemenis who may be supporting extremism. The failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to successful targeting of terrorists and the soft counterterrorism campaign. If Yemen is able to institute a program under the guidance of Saudi Arabia, which is able to defeat the extremist ideologies of AQAP, while at the same time continue to target the AQAP leadership, the Yemeni government could eliminate the network in its country.

The threat of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a substantial danger that not only Yemen should be concerned about. The United States is one of the main targets of the al-Qaeda affiliate, and with the attempted Christmas Day bombing, AQAP has shown they are capable of conducting operations outside of the Arabian Peninsula. This study has tried to show the context in which AQAP has been able to prosper by studying the chaotic history of Yemen in the latter half of the twentieth century, and the history of Yemen as an implicit supporter of jihad inside the country as well as abroad.

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<sup>227</sup> Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy," 4.

AQAP has been able to make a reemergence in Yemen because of Yemen's weak state characteristics, the failure of jihad in Saudi Arabia, and the apparent lack of political will to destroy the organization. AQAP has been able to exploit the weakness of the state to build a foundation for its organization, and is now capable of conducting operations throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the Western world. To combat the threat of AQAP in Yemen and prevent the country from becoming the next headquarters of the al-Qaeda leadership, the Yemeni state is going to need tremendous help from the West, the countries in its region, and the political will to fight AQAP will need to be increased. The GCC countries should see a stable Yemen as in their best interest, for if Yemen is allowed to fall into a failed state, the repercussions will most immediately be felt throughout the Gulf.

Yemen is a weak state and is in turmoil, but it is not a lost cause, and the United States should work with Yemen, the United Kingdom, and the GCC to strengthen Yemen so that it can combat the threat of global terrorism inside the country. Yemen is one of the most important countries in the global war on terrorism, behind only Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the United States should make its aid packages to the country proportional to its strategic importance.<sup>228</sup> Yemen should certainly be considered the main region the al-Qaeda leadership would move to should they be forced to flee the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Yemen has emerged as a major threat to the United States and other Western countries, and to counter the threat, the United States must help strengthen the Yemeni state. By studying the organization's history and the reasons it has been able to become a global threat to security once again, this study has tried to determine how to defeat the organization and prevent Yemen from becoming the United States' next Afghanistan.

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<sup>228</sup> Boucek, "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," 22.

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